University of Alberta

Intergenerational Theatre and the Role of Play

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Drama

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Abstract

The *GeriActors and Friends* is a company of intergenerational actors that is directed by Professor David Barnet of the University of Alberta. The *GeriActors* was a senior's theatre group creating original theatre since 2001 in Edmonton. The *GeriActors and Friends* was created as a result of Barnet's course Intergenerational Theatre 407/507, first offered in the fall 2006. The company is made up of two groups: university students and senior citizens.

This thesis is an exploratory analysis of the *GeriActors and Friends'* 2006/07 and 2007/08 seasons. Using these seasons as a case study, the theories of specific cultural theorists are used to analyze play and playfulness as it exists in the rehearsals and performances of the company. The analysis of playfulness is presented using autoethnographic research techniques that analyze the personal history of the researcher and a variety of qualitative methods which consider the two seasons of the community-based theatre company

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Introduction

My curiosity for this research project stems from two main areas: my time spent with *GeriActors and Friends* (G&F) over my first two seasons with the company; and my family history. In my time as a member of G&F it became apparent that play and playfulness are an important element to the weekly rehearsal sessions and the performances of the intergenerational theatre company. I am intrigued by the significance of playfulness for many reasons. When I first started, my conception of seniors did not include playfulness. I anticipated being delighted by learning about history and hearing stories from the past, but the laughing, playing, and silliness caught me off guard. G&F is able to cover a vast array of subject matter in rehearsal and performance because of this playfulness. I could see that there was power and energy in play, but whenever play and playfulness was discussed I felt unable to define the concept. Within the rehearsal periods with G&F much time is spent talking about our experiences of family. As I started to reminisce about my family, I could see that there was a specific playfulness that existed in my history, even in the dark periods. I could sense there was a link between the playful energy in my family and in the play and playfulness of G&F, so I decided to examine these ideas more closely.

I am proud to have the opportunity to sit down and write this thesis. I am proud of the work done with the G&F and excited to work with this community for my Master of Arts thesis. In this introduction, I convey three major points to my readers. I provide a brief introduction to G&F and my role with the company, give a history of the company, and introduce readers to the research methodology I have used, along with an explanation for using these specific techniques.

***GeriActors and Friends* and my Role**

GeriActors and Friends is a company of actors from several generations that is directed by Professor David Barnet of the University of Alberta. The *GeriActors* has been a seniors' theatre group that since 2001 has created and presented original theatre in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. *GeriActors and Friends* was created as a result of David's course, Intergenerational Theatre Drama 407/507, first offered in the Fall 2006. The company is made up of two groups: university students, and senior citizens. The university students are from a variety of age groups from twenties to fifties, and the senior citizens are sixty and older. As it creates theatre, the company works to include the different views of all its members, rather than showing a single point of view. Since January 2007, I have been the Assistant Director of the company, and I was the Graduate Teaching Assistant for the Intergenerational Theatre Drama 407/507 course in Fall 2007.

***GeriActors and Friends* History**

In September of 2001, Roger Laing, the Executive Director of the *Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE)*, asked David if he would work with a group of senior writers. David helped the group write for theatre and perform their scripts. The company gave their first performance at SAGE during the Christmas season 2001. David remembers that this was the moment he realized this type of senior community theatre would work (Barnet).

For its first five years, *GeriActors* was not intergenerational, although university students assisted David. The group had about eight to ten performances a year. All the scenes were developed from the conversations that took place during rehearsals. Also, members would bring previously written scenes into rehearsals. There was little overt playfulness in game form in the initial years. The seniors shared stories and spoke about

the scenes that they wanted to perform. David then took the material from these discussions and wrote scenes. After he wrote a scene, he would bring it back to the group and they would make changes. Some of these scenes worked very well when played for an audience. There are scenes titled "Broken Stove," "So It's All Arranged," and "Downsizing", which still could be successfully performed for an audience. One of the scenes performed in the early years was about a woman going through security at the Calgary Airport with a cow embryo around her neck and being questioned about what she planned to do with it. Her plan was to use it to impregnate one of her cows. This story is unique to the rural community because it contains a scenario that may only happen in a beef farming community.

One of the original members was a particularly good writer. She would sit in the group meetings and recite stories off the top of her head. Towards the end of her time with the company, she recited a novel chapter by chapter. Her strong desire to excel influenced the group to write and perform rich theatrical material. David told me that her most fulfilling experiences with the company were her opportunity to write and, when she was given the chance to fulfill one of her goals, to play Juliet. When she died in 2005 at the age of 84, the desire and ability to excel that she brought diminished in the group (Barnet).

David first introduced the idea of bringing students from the University of Alberta into the group towards the end of the company's fifth season. There was apprehension on the part of some GeriActors because of the age difference of university students, but many thought the idea of having the youth involved would be a great new adventure. Here is a quote from an interview that I conducted in researching the company's history with a GeriActor:

> With G&F what comes to mind is before the Friends were involved, David talked to us about wanting to do the course at the university which would involve students and the GeriActors. And he was throwing out whether we wanted to do that. People were a little hesitant but right away I thought it was a great idea. I am delighted that he went ahead with this course and that we have got to be a part of it. Because it has been a new adventure and the students have given us so many new ideas, so much love, so much of their enthusiasm that I have just found it a delightful thing.

Since I was one of the students in that initial Intergenerational Theatre class, and I continue to be involved, I can say that it indeed has been an adventure. In the beginning of the sixth season the students were introduced into the company, and the G&F was born.

Methodology

The research methods I am using represent the interdisciplinary nature of my project. They are participant observation, interviews, archival material, autoethnography, and a member check. I learned the interviewing and analysis techniques from Dr. Shaniff Esmail from the Department of Occupational Therapy. Dr. Diane Conrad from the Department of Secondary Education taught me autoethnography and personal research in an arts-based research course.

Participant Observation

I kept a journal during my time with the intergenerational group. Analysis of these notes assist in the exploration of my relationship with the group and how the group functions on a day-to-day basis.

Interviews

I interviewed ten members of the company using descriptive exploratory interviewing techniques (Kvale). This kind of interview allows the interview subject to dictate the path of the interview. The interviewer does not present a series of questions

but instead uses short phrases and open-ended questions to elicit a conversation with the subject. In these interviews, the members of the company spoke about the role of play, and their ideas about its importance to the process and performance of the company.

These interviews took place from June 9-16, 2008 after the completion of the second full season of G&F. Each interview was in the home of the person. Of the ten interviews I conducted, six interviewees were with GeriActors who clearly belong to the social category of senior; one was with an older student who blurs the category line of GeriActor and Friend; one was with a Friend; and two of them were with my fellow directors, one of whom is a senior professor at the university, Professor David Barnet, and the other a recently graduated undergraduate student.

I then analyzed the interviews using the constant comparative method of Kvale and Burnard (Patton). This method analyzes the interviews and arranges them by thematic points, allowing the researcher to view all the interviews collectively instead of as a collection of individual interviews. This analysis generated a summary interview document which reveals how the collective company answered the interviews, how they feel about the current state of the company and how G&F relates to play and playfulness. I also analyzed the interviews on an interview-by-interview basis. Both processes are important because while it is very useful to have a collective analysis of playfulness and G&F, it is also important to consider the singular perspectives. For instance, when viewed separately, it was apparent that the interviews with my fellow directors offered different insights than the members of the company. In this thesis, I use citations inside the text when referring to the summary interview document or the individual interviews. Only in the case of the interview with David Barnet will I use a formal citation.

I began each interview with the question, "What is the first thing that comes to mind when I say G&F and play?" After this, the interview was dictated by the response given by the participant. What I found telling about this series of interviews was that each member was excited to talk about play in the company. Every interview lasted between forty-five minutes to one hour fifteen minutes in length and was a fun sharing process filled with laughter and stories.

Viewing of Archival Materials

There is a video record of every meeting and performance of the *GeriActors and Friends* since the company started in fall 2006. For this research project, I reviewed the videos from the 2006/07 and the 2007/08 seasons to examine the rehearsal process and performance style.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is research that directly examines the life of the researcher and how his or her personal history influences the researcher to engage in the particular research area he or she has chosen. Using the methodology of qualitative researchers, I examined where I fit into the research project, using an autoethnographic narrative inquiry. It is important to name why I am involved in this work so my reader can understand my point of view. I analyzed what aspects of my past led to my interest in intergenerational theatre.

Member Check

After I finished my research and analysis, I took my findings back to the *GeriActors and Friends* so they could have an opportunity to respond to my research. I have taken their responses into account when finalizing my thesis. I have chosen to do this for two reasons. If any research project is based upon a community group, that group

should be given the opportunity to comment on the research project for the project to be within ethical boundaries. Many community groups have been offended by research that was disseminated into the academic community because they never had the chance to comment on the work. I want to ensure that G&F have a chance to comment on any aspects in my thesis. Also, this thesis does not represent work that I have done alone. It is representative of a collaborative project.

The member check took place the afternoon of May 12, 2009. I brought cookies to the event, another member brought a box of chocolates, and we chatted about a draft copy of my thesis. All of the members present were honored to be a part of this session. It was a fun afternoon where they gave me a few suggestions on where I could clear up some points, but mostly we just chatted about what stories came up in their minds from reading the thesis and specifically the autoethnographic section. They asked questions about where members of my family were now and gave me advice on how to grow from the discoveries I had made about myself in doing the research.

There was also a discussion about the reason for having a member check. One member felt I did not explain it very well. In response, one of the other GeriActors said,

> I think one reason why groups might be offended if they were not given the opportunity to read the final draft is no one likes to be an anthropological subject. It takes away your humanity and by giving us the opportunity to see what you have written it makes us feel more like people.

I agree; the process of doing the member check has given my thesis more humanity. They also felt that including the autoethnographic chapter achieved the same effect. Because I include personal details from my life they thought that the thesis has life and humanity.

Outline

I am presenting this thesis in five chapters:

Chapter 1 – The Play that Makes Life Worth Living

This chapter is an autoethnographic narrative inquiry into my personal history and how this affects my relationship with the *GeriActors and Friends,* and my research.

Chapter 2 – The Play and Playfulness of *GeriActors and Friends*

This chapter defines play and playfulness, and includes theories of play and its uses.

Chapter 3 – The Play and Playfulness of *GeriActors and Friends* in Rehearsal

This chapter is an analysis of play and playfulness as expressed in the rehearsals of the *GeriActors and Friends.*

Chapter 4 – The Play and Playfulness of *GeriActors and Friends* in Performance

This chapter is an analysis of play and playfulness as expressed in the performances of the *GeriActors and Friends.*

Conclusion – What can be learned from the Playfulness of *GeriActors and Friends*?

In this conclusion, I analyze what I have learned through the process of conducting this research, and I consider how G&F and other community art groups can use these theories to benefit their work.

Chapter One - The Play that Makes Life worth Living

It is important to consider a question before I go into the formal research topic. This question came to me from an arts-based research class with Diane Conrad in the fall of 2007. In a class some time towards the end of September, Diane asked us to split into groups of two and share a story with the other person that answered the question: Why are we personally interested in doing the research topic we chose for our thesis? In the first part of the activity we were to tell the other person the story in the third person to allow us to distance ourselves from the stories. This helped us allow personal subject matter to become available to us as research. I remember laughing at Diane because this was an activity I used with youth to let them talk about difficult stories from their lives, but I had never participated in the activity myself.

At the time of this class I knew I wanted to research *GeriActors and Friends*. During this class it came to me that I had three valuable relationships with elderly family members: my grandmother Frances Josephine Bowal; my Great Aunt Anna Revina Bowman; and a cousin, Francis William Yurkoski. All of these relationships have left me with some guilt. In class I shared with my partner the story of my relationship with my Grandmother.

In the second part of this activity the class was asked to share their partner's story and to tell it in the first person. When my partner told the class my story I felt that this story was important to include in my thesis. I wanted my readers to understand my history and how that has contributed to my attitude and approach to my research. I feel it is the best way to convey the authentic story.

To do the research for this narrative inquiry, I visited my Mother and we looked through the artifacts in her house. It was fun. We shared many laughs looking at pictures

and old memorabilia. Many of the objects I remember are gone but we still have some left. I love looking at the pictures and being able to hold the memories that I have. It feels nice to see the ring Alberta Government Telephones gave my Father when he retired in 1994 or hold a picture of him. I have not seen my Father for more than ten years, but I still think about him every day.

After I completed my personal research, I noticed that the initial drafts of this narrative inquiry contained many incorrect facts about these historic events. Looking back on what I had written, I could see that I had idealized much of what happened in the stories. I lied because it was easier to do in two ways: It made the story simpler if I left out certain details; and it also made me look better. In much of the storytelling I do, I tend to place myself as a tragic hero in the middle of a rigid superstructure. In writing these stories, I could see how much agency I had in some of the decisions I made. Also, when I read the stories to my mother, she told me of some mistakes I had made which I have since corrected.

It is interesting to analyze the roles that play and playfulness take in these anecdotes. Many of these stories contain a playful, childlike quality. The events occurred

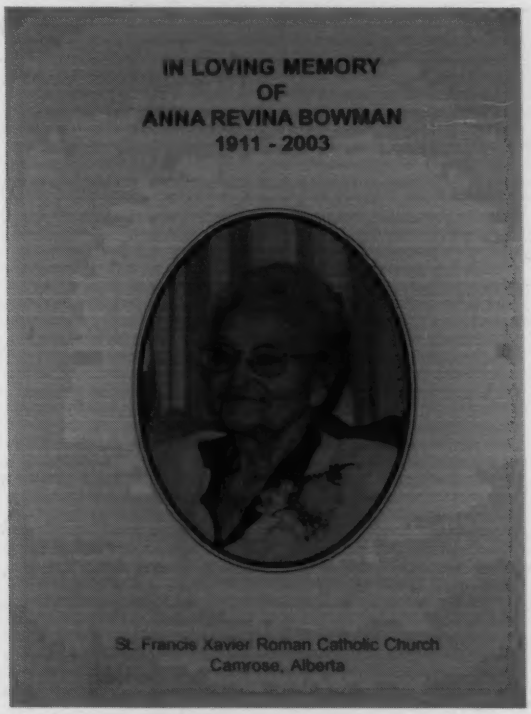
when I was young but they generally contain stories from dark times in my life. This allows me to believe there is much importance in having playfulness in our lives. It helps us through difficult times and allows for simple communication.

"Auntie Annie"

Auntie Annie's house was a great after school destination. She lived close to St. Pats Elementary school where I was schooled from kindergarten to grade nine. On days that my Mom would pick me up from school we would stop and visit her. Auntie Annie was not the most happy or welcoming lady on the block but she always had a chocolate bar for any kid that came into her home. She had a drawer in her bedroom that would always have about ten to fifteen different brands of chocolate bars to choose from. There were Macintosh Toffee, Oh Henry bars, Hershey's milk chocolate, Starburst candies, and lots of other brands. Her crude persona was softened by this kind gesture.

Anne Bowman had grown up in the Shelburne district, which was across the road from Round Hill, a small farming town outside Camrose, Alberta. She spent her life as a devout Catholic and enjoyed gardening and cooking. Her love of cooking stemmed from her job working as a cook on CN Rail for twenty years. Her candor and the manner of speech she used were influenced from the years she spent with the workers on the rail. I learned every swear word I know from her. My most memorable phrase that came out of her mouth was "the bastards." She was highly judgmental of people who "shack up" or "live in sin," even though she never married her partner, Alfred Crease, with whom she lived for 16 years. When I was younger I loved visiting her and listening to her stories. A large part of my enjoyment may have been that I got to watch an elderly woman use the language that I got into trouble for using. The chocolate bar she gave me did not hurt matters either.

In April 2003, her heart stopped while she was waiting in line to get her hair cut in Hawthorn Long-term Care Facility in Camrose. She died at the age of 94. I received the news of her dying from my mother while I was rehearsing a theatre piece at the Augustana University College Drama Department. My Mom drove to the theatre and told me while we were still in rehearsal. Because Auntie Anne had been in the hospital and other nursing homes for quite some time, her death did not come as a shock to me.



I was the technical supervisor for the show. The funeral for Auntie Annie was on Saturday April 26, 2003. We were rehearsing for a play festival happening April 25-26 in High River, Alberta. This meant that I had to make the decision between attending my Great Aunt's funeral or going to High River. I looked to my Mom for help, but she said it was a choice I had to make. She was right. I was a twenty-year-old man and I had to make this decision. I made the decision to do the show in High River, and to miss my Auntie's funeral. I now look back at this decision with regret. As I am writing this, I

cannot even remember the name of the play we performed, but I can remember that I missed my chance to formally say goodbye to my Auntie Annie.

"Elfie"

My experience with my cousin Elfie (Francis Yurkoski) is very similar. Elfie was my Mother's first cousin. We spent a lot of time visiting him and his wife Marion. My father helped him and he helped us with any home fix-ups or renovations that were needed. Sometimes I think the two of them created projects so they could spend time together.

The atmosphere in Elfie and Marion's house was very different from the one that my Mother and Father had created in our home. Their house had a pool table, it smelled of smoke because they both smoked, and, probably the biggest difference, Elfie and Marion argued a lot. Not the arguing we think of now that makes marriages end up in divorce but the arguing in which people who love each other engage. It was never violent or scary, but it was always there. For me, this was very interesting because my parents never argued in front of me and, to this day, my Mom assures me that they never argued. Elfie and Marion also swore. Thinking back to Auntie Annie you already know I liked hearing that when I was younger. I remember when I was nine years old getting a ride home with my Mom from playing hockey in Camrose. We lived on a farm a half mile South of Bittern Lake, which was about a fifteen-minute drive from Camrose. My Mom and I were talking about the refereeing in the game and I said that I thought they were, "Dumb as shit." My Mom was very angry with me and told me never to say that word. I remember feeling bad for making my Mom so angry but I was confused. I said to my Mom, "I heard Elfie say that word when we were visiting on Friday and you laughed."

As I am writing this, I am sitting on my Mom's couch and I just asked her how she felt when this happened. She just answered me, "I'm trapped. This little shit cornered me."

Elfie died from lung cancer in November of 2003. At this time I was living in Stettler, Alberta and working at the Stettler Public Library. I was coordinating an after-school reading program for youth that also taught the youth Spanish vocabulary. Elfie's funeral was scheduled for the same day as the final party for the group. It was too late to change the day of the party so once again I had to make the decision whether to attend a funeral of a loved one or to go another event. The fifteen youth that had regularly attended the after school program for three months would have been disappointed if I missed the final party. Because of this I made the decision to miss the funeral and host the party. I do not regret this decision. However, I am disappointed that I did not get the feeling that comes with attending a loved one's funeral.

"Grandma"

Of the stories I am including in this autoethnographic research section, the story of my Grandma is the most relevant to my involvement in senior's theatre. As a child I loved hockey. As an adult I still love the sport. My Grandma shared this with me. There is a famous story of Wayne Gretzky, the toddler, playing hockey with his Grandmother. I did the same thing with my Grandmother. I would make small balls out of tape for a puck. She was happy to play with me while we watched *Hockey Night in Canada*. She was a Toronto Maple Leafs fan, and I rooted for the Los Angeles Kings. In 1993, the Kings defeated the Leafs in the playoffs.

In fact, the night that the Kings put the final nail in the Maple Leaf's coffin, I called my Grandma to rub it in. I think I may have actually been manipulated into it by my Dad because he enjoyed bugging my Grandmother. Whenever he visited Grandma and she would do anything silly or out of the ordinary he would tell her that it was okay because she was an April Fool's baby born on April 1st. This frustrated my Grandma because she was actually born on April 2nd. Anyway, I phoned her after *Hockey Night in Canada* and I caught her at a bad time. The Catholic Church in Camrose would bring the Eucharist to the home if one of its parishioners was sick and cannot make it to church. When I called my Grandma to bug her, Father Kragbe was at her house giving her Eucharist. I was really embarrassed by this.

A photograph of my Father's hockey team jacket.

On February 28, 1995 my father passed away from a heart attack while he was driving home from playing hockey for the *Camrose All-nighters* in New Sarepta. A grader operator who worked for the County of Camrose found our 1988 Nissan pick-up truck still running, and my father with one glove on and the window rolled down, southbound on a gravel road northeast of Bittern Lake about twenty minutes from our farm. This meant that he had just had a smoke. It was his ritual to take off one glove, roll down the window and light a Medallion brand cigarette, which he smoked because they contained the lowest tar content of any smoke sold in Canada, with a Safeway brand match. On Wednesday March 1, 1995, I was supposed to go skiing at Canyon valley in Red Deer with the rest of the grade seven class from St. Pats. Instead my Mother woke me up with the news that my father had died the night before. I have not often skied since then.

My Mother has just told me the actual location where my Father was found. Until writing this inquiry I had thought that my Father was found southbound on Highway 21 by the RCMP. She was very surprised I did not know this but, then we realized this was

the first time we had talked about how my Father was found since that morning of March 1, 1995.

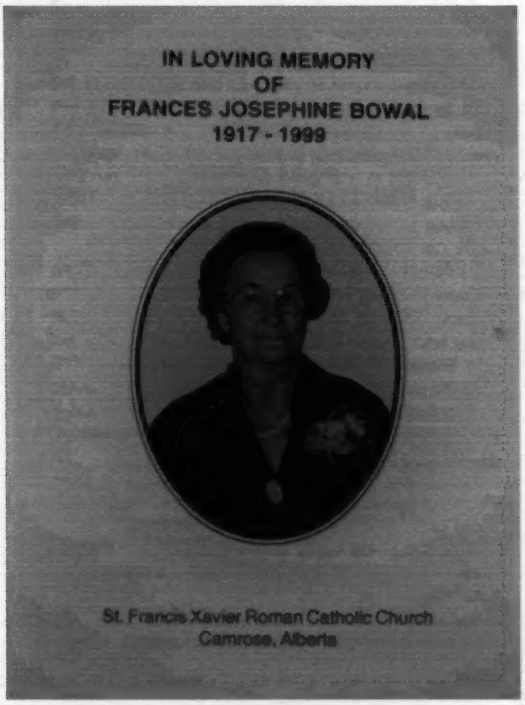
During the time we were grieving about my father passing away my Grandma was a great help to my Mom, my older brother, and to me. At the end of that March, she suffered a fall and broke her hip. This was the beginning of a downward spiral that ended in her moving out of her home into Bethany Long Term Care Facility.

She was wheelchair-bound from osteoporosis and osteoarthritis. She needed help to eat, bathe, move around, and perform every other basic function. She had multiple strokes affecting her throat and larynx, which made it nearly impossible for her to communicate. Her only way was by writing on notepads, but she had difficulty doing this because of the osteoarthritis.

My family suffered from this chain of tragedies. My junior high school years are a blur to me. After my Father had died and my Grandma moved into Bethany, my brother became abusive to my Mom and me. For two years, he became progressively more aggressive in his abuse, and eventually he ended up in jail for abusing my Mom. I believe that he suffered from my Father dying and he could not find any healthy ways to deal with this, along with other psychological battles he was having.

During the time that my Grandma lived in Bethany, my Mother and I visited her a few times a week. Because we lived on a farm fifteen minutes outside of Camrose, and we did not have cable television or satellite. We only had three channels. Whenever we visited my Grandma I was privileged to view cable television, which I loved. The shift from three channels to over thirty was fantastic. I was more interested in watching television than communicating with my Grandma. My Grandma, although she had difficulty communicating, had not lost any of her mental capacity. She was an intelligent

woman. Until she died, my Mom would ask her advice, and about the history of our family tree. For me, these visits were about watching TSN or wrestling, not about seeing my Grandma or anything else.



In March 1999, four years after my Father died, my Grandma passed away. Four years after my Dad had died. Her funeral was on Monday March 15. Her six grandchildren were the pallbearers, and I read at the funeral. Of the six grandchildren, I was the youngest by nine years. When we were in the hearse with the funeral director, my cousin Shawn, who was twenty-nine years old, said, "I am happy that I am never going to have to put you guys through this." This was such an odd thing to say at this moment. We were all in the most somber of moods. We had just walked out of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Camrose from our Grandmother's funeral.

My cousin Shannon, Shawn's thirty-three year old sister, asked him through a teary voice, "What do you mean, Shawn?"

"Don't you remember when we were kids and we got the magic eight ball for Christmas?"

"Yes."

"The question I asked it was if I would live forever. It said all signs point to yes."

I was glad my cousin said this. We all had a good laugh at his remark, even the funeral director who tried to hide it behind a mask of professionalism. It made me realize that humor and playfulness are so important when times are hard.

My Grandma's death represents the passing of the knowledge that she had. She had many stories that were never heard by anyone or documented anywhere. I feel guilty that I did not pay attention to these stories when I had the chance. Instead, I watched television and was more concerned with my own childish needs. The stories that are lost with my Grandma's passing hurt me. I would like to have some of these stories documented. It was brought to my attention that my feelings of guilt in this situation are possibly unnecessary. When I read this story aloud to Diane's class one of the other students pointed out to me that my Grandma and I had watched television when she was healthy too. She and I often watched television. Most likely my Grandma was very happy to watch television with me just as we always had; I should not feel guilty about it. However, this does not change any regret I have about her life stories not being documented, and her knowledge that died with her.

This is a part of the reason I work with seniors' theatre in an intergenerational group. I want to honor the valuable stories of seniors through performing them for an audience. I also want to ensure that other people from my generation get the opportunity to communicate with seniors. It is important for the stories and knowledge of these

seniors to be documented. They carry knowledge in them that will be lost forever if they are not passed down to the growing generation.

There is something important about the other anecdotes that I have included here. Whether you look at me swearing with my Mom, hockey with my Grandma, or my cousin's hoped-for immortality, they all contain a playful nature. It is the play and playfulness that we share that make the dark times possible to endure. Many huge challenges we face as humans are completely disarming, and when we encounter these times, communication is difficult. Playfulness helps us get through the challenges life offers, and helps our ability to communicate with one another.

Chapter Two – The Play and Playfulness of *GeriActors and Friends*

Because of my time with *GeriActors and Friends* (G&F), it has become apparent to me that play and playfulness are important to the success of the company. G&F use play and playfulness to create community, a safe environment in which to share life experience, and material for theatre. This chapter works to address the questions: What is a definition for play? What shape does play and playfulness allow the group process of G&F to take that it may not otherwise? How does play contribute to the artistic endeavors and group dynamic of G&F? I explore these questions using the interviews with the company, the video material, and my journal. To gain perspective, I conducted a literature review in which I addressed definitions of play, and investigated books on other senior and intergenerational theatre groups. This chapter is broken into three sections: a definition of play; play's relationship to ritual, liminality and communitas; and the specific play and playfulness of G&F.

A Definition of Play

In this section I provide a definition of two concepts, play and playfulness, based upon my experience of working with the company. I use the information collected from interviews with company members, and critical theory on play to further develop a definition. While providing a definition of play I discuss examples from my experiences to understand how play and playfulness exist in G&F.

What is the difference between play and playfulness? Play is a noun that refers to the action of playing. Playfulness is also a noun but it refers to behavior. A major difference between play and playfulness is repeatability. Play is something that can be re-created in different groups and situations. Play comes most often in the form of games or activities. Playfulness, however, is a quality that exists in social interactions and as an

attitude. In G&F, play grows from the playfulness shared by the company. It is the essential quality of playfulness that allows G&F to function as a company. G&F relies on playfulness to create community, a safe environment, and theatre.

Members of G&F say that there is a freedom created through play that allows the group to let go of inhibitions. The group is free to explore many different possibilities. Freedom achieved through playfulness allows participants to explore stories that have happened in their lives. Paul Sills quotes his mother Viola Spolin:

> Theater games do not inspire 'proper' moral behavior (good/bad), but rather seek to free each person to feel his or her own true nature, out of which a felt, experienced, actual love of neighbor will appear (Sills xi).

This idea fits with our group, because much of G&F's play begins with theatre games. Spolin believes that theatre games allow people to feel personal freedom (Spolin 6). I can see this release in the rehearsal footage: it is as if a veil has been lifted, allowing a member to play freely in a game or an improvisation. The idea that play allows for freedom was apparent in every interview.

Stephen Nachmanovitch and Johan Huizinga both support the notion that play is freeing. Nachmanovitch, in his book *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art,* defines play as a space where we "free ourselves from arbitrary restrictions" and open ourselves to new experiences (Nachmanovitch 43). In Huizinga's definition of play, a major characteristic is freedom (Huizinga 8). When considering the play of children or any playfulness in adults, it is logical to assume it is freeing. Freedom is required to engage in the silliness and fun that play and playfulness bring. The question that arises from this is: How is it possible to be free to play?

The interviews reveal that members of G&F believe play happens in a safe space. Play is related to trust and leads to the creation of a safe environment or a space without

fear. One member said that he believed play builds a shared sense of camaraderie. Richard Schechner believes that security or a safety net of some sort is needed in order to reach a state of play (Schechner 27). One of the G&F members thought this safe space is created because when G&F play, they cannot and do not judge. Safe space needs to exist in order for play to occur. In G&F, these two conditions occurred simultaneously: when the intergenerational company first started to play together, a safe space came about at the same time. Play and safe space naturally satisfied the needs of the group. Now that the play and safe space has became a staple in G&F, new members coming in need an invitation to join in on the play. Here is a quote from a new GeriActor that came from the member check:

> My experience was that I didn't enter play and develop a sense of playfulness just by being together. David had to invite us, give us permission to be silly, in fact even encourage us. It doesn't always happen automatically. You have to be coaxed and encouraged to let go. Just forget about all those things, those rules you used to have for behavior let's get up there and play. It doesn't happen by getting a group of people together.

Even though in G&F, safe space and play originally happened at the same, it is the safe space that needs to be in place first. As soon as someone realizes that they are in a safe atmosphere, they are then able to play.

In speaking about the intergenerational company *Roots and Branches,* director Arthur Strimling writes,

> In a conventional production where actors are brought together to perform roles in a scripted play, it is often better that the actors not get to know one another personally, at least at first, so that personal relationships don't leak into character relationships. Ensemble-created plays are the opposite. They require intimacy; the actors have to reach into themselves for the material that will become the play, and that requires a different kind of trust and openness in the group (Strimling 46).

He believes that since the performances of *Roots and Branches* are ensemble created, the company needs a safe space in which to work. This principle also applies to G&F. We have a close relationship because we perform material that is collectively created. Members of G&F share together the risk of creation and performance.

One of G&F's members identified that their play is not competitive. The intergenerational group plays together and everyone tries to help each other be playful instead of trying to do better than another. However, Neva Boyd states that play often involves competition. She says that ideally, this competition should not cause any ill will (Boyd 36). Johan Huizinga believes that all play has some competition but believes that it may not necessarily be for something, but "in and with something" (Huizinga 72). This means that the competition is not between people, but is inside an individual, as in a competition that engages a person to become more skilled at a task. The GeriActor who identified that there is no competition in G&F is correct. There is not overt competition, because G&F's playfulness has the ability to overcome the natural competition we experience as humans. In competition, one individual or group tries to out-perform another individual or group so they can be recognized as the victor. With the playfulness in G&F, there is a willing acceptance and development of other people's thoughts and ideas. Therefore, in G&F, when an individual or group performs well, it is celebrated and not seen as a loss to any one person. Instead, the response is to continually accept and develop the ideas put forth. This causes constant growth in the company, as G&F builds upon each other's ideas through play.

Many of the members spoke about how important singing is to the play shared in G&F. We sing many songs together in the group. Johan Huizinga describes the relationship between play and music. He writes,

> Making music bears at the outset all the formal characteristics of play proper: the activity begins and ends within strict limits of time and place, is repeatable, consists essentially in order, rhythm, alteration, transports audience and performers alike out of their 'ordinary' life into a sphere of gladness and serenity, which makes even sad music a lofty pleasure (Huizinga 62).

In G&F, often we begin our rehearsals by singing together. We use the activity of singing to get ourselves to a space where we are better able to engage in play.

There is a relationship between play and childhood creativity. In the interviews, it was said that play brings the group back to the innocence of childhood and unlocks childhood creativity. One of the seniors thought that the playfulness of G&F linked to the play of children because of the simplicity of the objects used. Children have an ability to turn any object into a toy, and the same thing occurs in rehearsals and performances of G&F. This shows the link between childhood play and theatre. Theatre is able to take any object and give it life as another object. Children do the same thing in their play. Nachmanovitch believes that play can bring us to our "original child-mind" (Nachmanovotch 47):

> We see *bricolage* in small children, who will incorporate anything into their play – whatever piece of stuff is lying on the ground, whatever piece of information they picked up at breakfast (Nachmanovitch 86).

In one of the interviews, a GeriActor stated,

> Oh yes, because we would take a piece of cloth and turn it into a skirt and that's what we do at the GeriActors. We, if someone is going to be a street person they wear an old plaid coat and a funny hat. We make costumes out of materials that are easily found. We don't use expensive costumes. We just do what children do. We take what is available and we turn it into the clothing needed to be a character in a scene.

Theatre practitioner and educator Keith Johnstone writes, "I began to think of children not as immature adults, but of adults as atrophied children" (Johnstone 25). There is an element to childhood that allows for a kind of play that takes special effort to reach as an

adult. In theatre, we work to have *bricolage*, the use of a variety of objects in play, which comes naturally to children. Children come naturally to play, and as adults we must work to find the same nature that enables us to be as creative as we were in childhood.

Johan Huizinga, in the foreword for his book *Homo Ludens: A Study of Play Element in Culture,* writes that play is a necessary function that is just as important as reasoning or working, and that it is older than culture or civilization. He points out that the play of animals fills a similar function to the play of humans (Huizinga 1). Animals play to learn natural survival skills. Think of lion cubs play fighting to learn to hunt. As humans, we play sports and games to learn coordination and to learn the social roles we will fill in later life. Neva Boyd states that play is "common human behavior" (Boyd 1), and we can see this through our own lives. For a child, play is natural, and it can stay that way for adults. But play manifests itself in different ways in adults, such as through a sense of humour or, as often is the case, it is suppressed by the needs and stresses of daily life.

In some critical material written on play, theorists believe that play in adults exists as a substitute for something that is lacking. Samuel Selden believes that play is sometimes a substitute for an activity that a person did earlier in their life (Selden 7). People watch games that they used to play when they were younger. Eric Berne posits that play and games are merely substitutes for "the real living of real intimacy" (Berne 18). This points to the idea that play is used to function as a substitute for real lived experience. However, this does not make sense to me. It seems to me that play feeds energy into life that cannot be achieved by any other means. As I have already written, play contributes to honing instincts, helping to create a safe environment, in part by establishing a positive group dynamic. Besides these benefits, playing gives energy to its

participants. Play is not merely a substitute for anything. If we play a game that we would have played when we were younger, it re-invigorates us to find new energy, and if we play at something we have yet to experience, we are training ourselves for what lies ahead.

When working on any definition of a concept, it is useful to define its opposite. It can be helpful in gaining an understanding of a concept. But what would be the opposite of play? Huizinga does not believe that there is an opposite. He writes that work could be considered its opposite but that this is not accurate (Huizinga 64). Play can be work, just as play can be very serious (Huizinga 5). The question remains: what is the opposite of play? Perhaps there is no opposite, but only a deficit of play. This would be any time when there is complete or partial absence of play. Play is the result of people accepting and developing each other's ideas or, as in Keith Johnstone's work, a state of "yes, let's…". The opposite would be those times when the ideas and thoughts of other are blocked or when people say "no". Any activity that has a lack of acceptance of ideas or any act that causes other people to become less playful is a deficit of play. Think of children who are playing a game with an object and one of the children runs away with that object in an effort to stop the game because it was not playing out the way he/she had planned. This selfish act ends the playfulness, acceptance, and creativity, and results in a deficit of play.

In the critical resources available on play, there are some mentions of negative forces in play. Huizinga identifies that if a person withdraws from play it can spoil the world created. Also, if there is a play-community created, a single person leaving can threaten the existence of the group (Huizinga 11). Neva Boyd suggests that even a negative attitude can destroy any play that is happening (Boyd 6). These are examples of

the opposite of play. Anything that stops the flow of energy created by play and playfulness is negative and can be described as the opposite of play.

Johan Huizinga writes about the creation of a play community (Huizinga 12). Many times a community will form because they are having fun playing together. This does not mean that every game results in a play community but there is something unique that happens when a group of people come together to play. There is a special quality in group play that does not occur in individual play. When a group comes together to play there is a mutual energy created that is shared among individuals acting as a play community. When a group is engaged as a play community they are combining their playful energy to grow intellectually, socially, and physically. This is the special quality, the combined goal of intellectual, social, and physical growth through play.

Neva Boyd defines play as an activity that is enjoyable. Play can be distinguished from other forms of behavior by the qualities of pleasure, enjoyment, fun, and the exercise of imagination (Boyd 2). Play should be exhilarating and have the ability to make the participants happy (Boyd 3). Boyd writes,

> My own definition is that to play is to transport oneself psychologically into an imaginatively set up situation and to act consistently within it, simply for the intrinsic satisfaction one has in playing (Boyd 9).

Mitchell and Mason agree with Boyd's assertion that play should produce pleasure. They believe this pleasure comes from the internal goals that are set up within playing. An individual or a group obtains pleasure from the "pursuing and accomplishing of these goals" (Mitchell and Mason 107).

Mitchell and Mason examine five traditional theories of play: surplus energy theory, recreation theory, instinct practice theory, recapitulation theory, and catharsis theory (63). Surplus theory is the idea that children need to "blow off" their extra energy.

They are full of animal spirits and cannot keep still (64). Recreation theory states that play is needed because people needs to refresh themselves after work (68). Instinct practice theory suggests that "Play arises in each young individual from the appearance of certain very important instincts before he has serious need of them" (71). Recapitulation theory suggests that play is something we do because humans have a predisposition to play that has been passed through the ages (76). Catharsis theory maintains that play can rid an individual of distressing emotions (77).

Some of these theories are useful in examining G&F's experiences. Surplus energy may not apply to G&F, if the idea of this theory is to "blow off" excess energy. I believe G&F does not fit into this theory. In G&F, play and playfulness are used to become energetic. This insight into play giving members energy led David and me to posit other possible theories. David used the term "Re-invigoration Theory." This would be a theory in which play is used to energize a group or individual to pursue other activities. In the member check, one of the members said that this was true to her experience. She said that often she feels tired when she comes to rehearsal but when she leaves she has energy. Recreation theory does apply to G&F. Rehearsals are a place for the members to refresh themselves. For the seniors, being involved in an artistic group can be seen as a recreational activity to engage in at retirement. Catharsis theory in G&F can be seen when the members share their troubled times with one another. Often in our "check-in" time at the beginning of rehearsals members will share what is troubling them that day. Then G&F engage in play and those individuals seem to lose their worries for the time they are with the group. This insight came out in the interviews. Many members feel when they play with the group and they are having a bad day they feel better about their troubles.

Play's Relationship to Ritual, Liminality, and Communitas

Play and Ritual

Play is an activity that takes place in a space separate from day-to-day life. Johan Huizinga describes it as an "interlude in our daily life" (9). This suggests that we live life through daily routine and responsibilities and play exists outside of those activities. Neva Boyd in an unpublished article writes,

> Play in all its forms is a complete contrast to conventional behavior and legitimates originality, giving it full release, for play creates its own world. Play is that form of social organization through which original nature is channeled most unhampered, and yet the play patterns of a particular cultural group are not a violation of social customs but rather a preserver of them (Boyd 3).

Psychologist Roger Caillois believes that play is carefully removed from life and is enjoyed in "precise limits of time and place" (Caillois 6). Richard Schechner, on the other hand, writes that it is incorrect to consider play as an interruption of life. He believes playfulness is always underlying everything we encounter in life. Play acts as a source of energy for our daily lives (42).

G&F has a ritual to their rehearsal process. The ritual is used as a frame to assist the group in entering a creative environment. The existence of ritual was first identified in a group meeting by a student in David's Intergenerational Theatre course on September 25, 2007. In an excerpt from my journal on that day, I expand on the student's ideas:

> I can communicate what I see as our ritual right here but I have to say that I believe each member of the group would have a different interpretation of what defines our ritual. I walk into SAGE and sit at the *Sunshine Café*. There are usually other members and we chat for a while. When most of the group is congregated or 1:15 hits we all go downstairs. Once we prepare our room we have a check-in where the group has an opportunity to share about any significant events that happened in their week. After this we work. After work time is done we

have coffee. We then work for another period of time and we finish with a short chat about the rehearsal. I will list the ritual events here:

1. Sunshine Café pre-rehearsal meeting
2. Check-in
3. Rehearsal Time
4. Coffee Break
5. Rehearsal Time
6. Check-out

This structure is not always adhered to but it is always loosely present. It will be valuable to identify this protocol because I believe it is in this very structure that we have success. Our community relies on the family atmosphere that is created in this structure. Our gathering before rehearsal and the coffee break are essential in creating a tight relationship. Also, the opportunity to share the week's events lends to the atmosphere that we care about each other's lives. The check-out shows that it is important how the members feel during the rehearsal. This structure is important to our success and could, potentially, be used as a model for other groups.

Entering into the ritual of G&F is an important process for members of the company, because it allows them to leave behind their day and enter into the rehearsal space. In the member check, one of the members spoke about how the "check-in" section allows for this process to occur. He stated,

> The check-in is a process in which we change from getting here to being here. There is all this rush about will I catch the bus, or will I be late. Finally, you get here but you are not really here yet because you are still somewhere else. So, you calm down and you start to connect with the other people and before you know it you are here.

Also in the member check, it was brought to my attention that the ritual is different for some members of the company. Two of the members of the company have never joined us for lunch in the Sunshine Café because they did not realize that we had lunch at the café before each rehearsal. Their ritual has been to arrive at SAGE and set up all the chairs and table before each meeting. They have a different ritual.

Roots and Branches, an intergenerational theatre company from New York, has a ritual as well. Strimling writes that in every rehearsal they begin by sitting around a table and having a chat (Strimling 63). This is similar to how G&F starts rehearsals. In *Creativity Matters: The Arts and Aging Toolkit*, Boyer advises new groups to give meetings a regular sequence, or in other words, a ritual (Boyer 86). Ritual gives a framework to help any group enter a space for creation. It helps the members of G&F enter a space where they can be playful and have fun.

As part of G&F's ritual, the coffee break is important. It is even incorporated into many performances. Here is a transcription of an introduction to a coffee break at a performance:

> December 6, 2006
> Jake: And every week we come, Harriett who is not with us today makes ridiculous amounts of baking she brings this big freaking tub. That is just…Oh, she just made Brownies or a new cookie recipe oh they're pretty good I don't know.
> Jen: Every time we see her coming with her Tupperware we are like, huh, I can't wait.
> Jake: It is the same tub every week and we are all, ohhhh.
> Jen: And at every coffee break everybody just runs straight bee-line for the…
> Lisa: Oh, Apple pie.
> Jen: Oh right, we had Apple Pie for Thanksgiving and pumpkin cookies with eyeballs. It wasn't just random easy baking. These were some complicated cookies and she was very excited it was catered tonight so she didn't have to bring anything.

In a journal entry, I also wrote about the importance of food.

> October 31, 2006
> I was really taken by the comment today of how much food there was at last week's rehearsal. It was impressive. The reason this over amount of food started was because of Harriett's desire to no longer bring baking. Now we are getting an array of food. This is another success of the group. We compensate when one of our members proclaims a need.

Strimling also talks about food. He writes about how they start each season with a party to integrate the generations; they have juice and cookies to help bring them together (Strimling 23). Food is important to G&F's ritual because there is a special quality to sharing food with others. It is similar to a family sharing a dinner on a special occasion, or a lunch or dinner date with a significant other. A level of familiarity is established when a group of people eat together. This helps G&F come to a shared space which feels unique and allows for the members to be playful and create theatre together.

Play and Liminality

In his book *Performativity*, James Loxley writes that for theorist Victor Turner, ritual is a liminal process because it involves transformation of the participants (Loxley 155). He goes on to say the liminal phase is marked by fluidity and the possibility of creativity, invention and innovation. Liminality is anti-structure; it is a moment when the past is suspended and the future is not yet started, and is a moment of "pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance" (Loxley 156). He writes,

> So the relationship between ritual process and the everyday is a complicated one: as it stands apart, like the non-serious interludes of play, but it also has the function of enacting changes in status which relate directly to the everyday world. At the same time, it not only discharges this function but also hints at possible changes and transformations of the society in which it works, and here it manifests some of the radical freedom from responsibility associated with play (Loxley 156).

Loxley suggests that ritual is closely related to play in that they both stand apart from day-to-day life in their own time and have the ability to influence change in day-to-day life. In both ritual and play, individuals can change and while they have this experience they can also examine the potential for changes in society. Liminality describes a space in which the individual can change and explores the possible changes in society.

Reader response theorist Wolfgang Iser writes about liminal space as being an open space where something is born (Iser 147). He states that play is the "interface of the modes through which the liminal space is negotiated" (Iser 148). Victor Turner compares liminality to anti-structure (dissolution of normal societal structures) and relates it to children's games (Turner 28). This pertains to G&F because of their use of games in the rehearsal process. Many games G&F play utilize the anti-structural form of children's games. There is a free-flowing form to children's play that leads to creativity. This anti-structure helps G&F create theatre together.

Johan Huizinga believes that a sense of wonderment is integral to play which has the question "Will it come off?" (Huizinga 68). I believe Huizinga's question indicates an important relationship between play and liminality and justifies my description of G&F's play as creating liminal space. Entry into a liminal space evoked by play and playfulness is where theatrical collective creation takes place. In G&F there is not the question "Will it come off?", but the question is "What will happen next?" Many times, as directors, we enter rehearsal with a loose plan that has structured gaps, so that we can respond to the fluid needs of the group. When a discussion takes us into an unplanned direction, we need to allow the natural flow of the company to dictate where we will go next. As directors, we seek these moments in rehearsal because they are often useful in writing scripts. As a company, G&F is engaged in the present, current, and spontaneous interactions among the members of the company. Effective scripts are developed from our sense of being in the moment. Better ideas often come from the spontaneous play rather than from planned activities.

Play and Communitas

The state of liminality is closely related to communitas (Turner 45). Communitas is experienced in the dynamic process of forming a community. In community theatre this can occur between audience and actors, or in the case of G&F, between two different cultural groups: students and seniors. Richard Schechner writes that any liminal space is a fluid point between two groupings. He believes that for a brief time in this space the two groups merge into one. During this time, communitas is possible, and during this time there is a leveling of all differences (Schechner 74). This process of two groupings coming together is the process G&F goes through in two major interactions: when the students and seniors come together in rehearsal; and when the company shares this process with an audience in performance.

Victor Turner suggests two different types of communitas that apply to G&F: spontaneous and normative. Spontaneous is "direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities" (Turner 48). Normative is "a subculture or group which attempts to foster and maintain relationships or spontaneous communitas on a more or less permanent basis" (Turner 48). G&F's rehearsal times could be considered normative communitas: we meet on a regular basis with the goal of sharing spontaneous play and communitas. When G&F has a performance, however, the goal is for the audience to experience spontaneous communitas.

Neva Boyd believes that during play the players experience new values. They have a sense of "social obligation to contribute to the maintenance of the common project undertaken by the play group" (Boyd 3). She posits that any community member that engages in play activity that requires "reciprocal responsiveness" will unconsciously acquire an understanding of their individual self and of the members of the community

(Boyd 7). In this, Boyd is describing the relationship between play and communitas: the process of communitas is helped by the inclusion of play. G&F is able to reach communitas internally and in performance because of their shared playfulness.

Play and Playfulness of *GeriActors and Friends*

The following section examines intergenerational play and what that means for the different generations in G&F. I start by first examining the conditions in which the company began, and then I write about how playfulness manifests itself during the time that the generations share together.

Intergenerational Play

Birth of *GeriActors and Friends*

In the Fall of 2006, the company *GeriActors* included students from the University of Alberta from Professor David Barnet's Intergenerational Theatre 407/507 course. This was the initial seed that eventually led later that season to the creation of the intergenerational company. During this semester-long course it was evident that something special was happening. Profound relationships were being formed between generations through playing and sharing stories. In January 2007, after the course ended and the students had left, *GeriActors* was again made up solely of seniors and there was a shift in the mood of the seniors' company. *GeriActors* was not completely without students; during this period, I was the Assistant Director. It was difficult for me to bring a playful energy in my role as director. The company went from a group that was at the height of creative playful energy to a very low energy atmosphere that sometimes even became hostile. Here is an excerpt from my journal:

> February 15, 2007
> The general mood at this point is very low. We are very low in energy and seem to be more about in-the-head talking than actually getting up

> and doing theatre. I know this will change when we get more members but for now it is what it is. I really feel like I am still enjoying everything but I am not sure if the participants are enjoying it as much as they were when the students were present.

David and I discussed the energy I am able to bring to the group as a director. David has a strong ability to energize a group of people. As a leader, he directs with an energy that the participants readily follow. At this time, when I was first starting as Assistant Director, I was not able to bring the same level of energy. I was nervous and afraid of making a mistake. In our discussion, David told me his experiences when he was a young director. He was often uncomfortable when directing, but felt natural when in the role of instructor. He then worked to bring the same level of comfort to directing that he had in teaching. From this conversation I was able to extrapolate for myself a similar technique. In my professional life I feel comfortable and confident in administrative situations. Either when sitting on a board or when organizing a conference, tour, or event, I am in control even in chaos. My ambition now is to transfer this confidence to my role as director. While this will take time and experience, I now feel more comfortable because I have some clarity on how to meet this goal.

During this low period, David was invited to bring the *GeriActors* to a conference. The organizers were interested in seeing a performance by an intergenerational group for a conference on May 15, 2007. So young people were invited to return, and the rehearsal process came to life again. The room was filled with laughter and playfulness. When two additional students were introduced into the group, all of the seniors came alive and began to have fun. Here is an excerpt from my journal after the first rehearsal:

May 1, 2007
It is very apparent that we should head in the direction of only doing intergenerational work. Today was so full of life. What I find interesting is that originally when we analyzed why intergenerational theatre worked so well, I thought it was because of this theatre being a sharing space for two different generations. Seniors share stories with youth and vice versa. But we did not engage in story sharing in this day, we only rehearsed for a performance. This leads me to believe that we are doing something different than just allowing for sharing. We are creating a necessary community. Our society does not have many spaces where young people and seniors converge. We do this in our family but that often has a sense of obligation to it. With our intergenerational community everyone who is there has chosen to be there and wants to participate. This community is filling a gap left by the current condition in our society. Stereotypically this relationship does not work but when both parties are willing to meet on level ground it creates a wonderful community. Theatre here is filling a gap left in our society. I contend this could be a major function of community theatre. We have found a community that is beneficial to our society, that is not prevalent, and we are creating a space for this community to exist by using theatre as a common meeting place. It is community theatre working very well.

After this rehearsal David and I committed ourselves to doing intergenerational theatre. David hired an administrative director to our management team and as a group we decided that the company should be re-named *GeriActors and Friends.*

Many of the feelings and thoughts during this time were similar to other intergenerational groups. Linda Winston, in her book *Grandpartners: Intergenerational Learning and Civic Renewal, K-6,* praises intergenerational relationships that are not biological because they change the relationship between generations and connect people in a "meaningful, life-enhancing way" (Winston 3). Anne Davis Basting in *The Stages of Age* writes,

> Besides easing fears and isolation, intergenerational relationships present largely untapped opportunities to question current cultural practices by creating dialogue across historical locations, between the present and the past (Basting 184).

Pam Schweitzer and Arthur Strimling both work with intergenerational theatre companies. In fact, when David was first working on the intergenerational class he used Schweitzer's and Strimling's works as inspiration. Schweitzer, who works in Britain, believes that intergenerational theatre projects lead to trusting relationships "between generations who would normally not encounter each other" (Schweitzer 256). Strimling believes that we have lost an important part of ourselves that we can regain if generations connect (Strimling 4). He traces human history back to times when families lived together, often having several generations in the same house. Now our day-to-day lives are filled with people who are mainly from our own generation (Strimling 5). He believes that the older generation has knowledge to pass to the younger generation.

> …there are kinds of life experience that do not become obsolete. The wisdom of a life well lived does not change – all of us are children and adolescents; we go to school, work, learn about sex, friendship and love, money and family, success and failure, loyalty and betrayal, loneliness, self-mastery, about how to accept aging and death. This kind of knowledge, as the Bible and great literature teach us, does not change from generation to generation, and can be transmitted (Strimling 7).

From his experience working with his company, he states that once the different generations were brought into the same room there was a "deep hunger" for a relationship and they bonded very quickly (Strimling 24).

Play Between Generations

> The students are a real bonus to the GeriActors. They bring not only their drama experience from university but a youthful ambiance of fun and lively energy and fun and new ideas and they respect and work well with us. They are always patient and sometimes we flub our lines and they are always there to help us and to take part in the scenes. When they take part in the scenes they always give their all. I think it is really, the intergenerational theatre brings joy to both the students and the seniors (GeriActor).

In the interviews, I found that members from both generations believe that the intergenerational relationships are the key to playfulness. Two of the Friends identified that play has a power to blur the line between young and old. One stated that by playing together, the stereotypes of young and old are broken. Normally elders are viewed as wise and that the young should just sit and listen, but that line is blurred which allows for a true sharing. Another younger member said that play breaks down the intimidation factor between young and old and that the labels of young and old disappear inside our play.

Two GeriActors identified that play is important in getting the group up on their feet and active. One of them stated that seniors have a tendency to sit around and talk, and that play has forced them to get up and get their adrenaline flowing. Another GeriActor believed that as adults we have learned rules throughout life that stop us from being playful and that it is difficult to get back to play. Neva Boyd writes:

> Relatively few adults actually play but a sort of residue of the joyful play experienced in a person's childhood and youth remains with them always and flavors life as nothing else does (Boyd 2).

G&F have moments where we are close to reaching the "joyful play" of childhood. In the interviews, the GeriActors told me that playing with younger members of G&F is like playing with their grandchildren. One member said the play she does with G&F is just like the play she shares with her granddaughter. Another member told me that when she plays with her granddaughter she forgets about the world around her, and she exists "in the moment" just as when she plays with G&F.

In the interviews the GeriActors thought that one of the benefits to having the students in the company was that they helped the seniors feel free to play. The GeriActors see little hesitation when the Friends get up and play. They also commented that the

students have much energy that in turn fills them up with energy. One of the Friends said that the students lead the seniors into play and make it okay to play.

From the discussion about what the students offer the seniors I ask the question: What do the GeriActors offer the Friends that make this relationship reciprocal? One of the Friends was impressed by the level of dedication the seniors have to the group. No matter what occurs it seems that every Thursday, each member of G&F will show up, and if they do not, there is an excusable reason. Also, the GeriActors are dedicated to being members of the company year in and year out. Some of the members have been there for seven or eight years. This differs with the students, because they are at a different point in their lives. They move on to careers after finishing their studies, move out of the country in search of adventure, or move on to further education.

For me, what I find inspiring is the level of artistic growth I see in individual members of the company. Over two seasons I saw members develop from experiencing discomfort onstage to confidence when improvising for an audience. As a company, G&F has grown in artistic endeavors because of the individual growth of the actors. This is inspirational. To see growth like this in an elder from my community makes me realize that as humans we can grow, learn, and find adventure during our entire lives. Seeing these healthy seniors engage in this growth teaches me the importance of life-long learning. I am also driven to ensure that stories from the older generation are shared with younger people. These are stories of merit and value that should be heard by audiences and I am driven to see them performed.

Three of the GeriActors told me that when they were children, their circumstances growing up did not allow them to play. Now that they are seniors and they are given the chance to play, they are enjoying it. One of these seniors grew up in Holland during

World War II and his childhood was taken up with the need for survival. Another GeriActor moved around a lot as a child so he never kept friends, while another was put in the position of caregiver to her younger sisters when she was still very young.

When I was twelve years old, my father died and my older brother became abusive to my Mother and me, which caused me to grow up rapidly in my junior high years. My Mother and I became each other's emotional support. We had to make difficult decisions in those years, and we made them together. In the two years following my Father's death, we made decisions that ended in my brother being sent to jail and we also made the difficult decision to move off our farm in Bittern Lake that my Mother and Father built together. Often when my Mother and I talk about this period in our lives, she regrets having had to depend on me. She wishes that she could have let me be a child. But I am happy with the person I have become, and how this period of my life truly defined me, and I have no regrets. I hope and believe that she knows this.

Because of these and other events in my life, I missed out on years of play. This contributes to the importance I place on the play and playfulness that I share with G&F at rehearsals on Thursday afternoons.

In the interviews it was often said that laughter builds community, and the fact that G&F share a laugh about mistakes makes us relieved to know that we do not have to be perfect. One of the GeriActors felt that the play gives freedom to make mistakes, and that when mistakes are made we get to know each other better:

> I think G&F allows us freedom. I think so many people in life are afraid of making a mistake or doing something wrong or something that isn't them. In GeriActors we have the freedom to make a mistake and we make fun of it or correct it or whatever but we don't dwell on it. I think that is so important that you don't dwell on your mistakes; if you make them you acknowledge them and you carry on from them.

I have observed in G&F that seniors are able to laugh at their mistakes. A GeriActor stated that seniors laugh because they have nothing to lose and have seen many stresses in life and do not see the need to worry about most problems. Two of the Friends felt that laughing at mistakes is something that comes with age and experience. One of them stated that one learns from the seniors not to take life too seriously. Pam Schweitzer calls this a "failure-free environment" (Schweitzer 251). In *Free Play,* Stephen Nachmanovich writes about mistakes:

> In school, in the workplace, in learning an art or sport, we are taught to fear, hide, or avoid mistakes. But mistakes are of incalculable value to us. There is a value of mistakes as the raw material of learning. If we don't make mistakes, we are unlikely to make anything at all (Nachmanovich 88).

One of the younger members interviewed was amazed at the sharing that takes place between generations in the form of childhood play. She told me that with some of the seniors, she plays poking games and giggles while instructions are happening, and that she even had an arm wrestle with one the seniors (the senior won). In another interview, a Friend felt that the theatrical play between generations allows us to try on the other's persona for a while – young can play old, – and old can play young.

A strong example of play between generations took place in rehearsal on October 26, 2006. Play was very evident in this first time that a female GeriActor performed as a young boy in a bar. This was the day that a Friend helped to teach her how to walk like a young man. This was a good example of an intergenerational exchange using playfulness. The Friend said to the GeriActor, "You need to be more gangsta'." The Friend and I also taught her a number of hip-hop phrases to help her portray a young person.

Another strong example of shared play between generations happened on September 20, 2007. A Friend was lucky enough to learn how to use a GeriActor's motorized wheelchair. Here is my journal for that day:

> September 20, 2007
> In the activity of everyone sharing their tasks one group missed the actual described activity. Instead of teaching each other tasks to do, they did introductions. After they finished I made fun of them for having completely missed the point of the activity. A GeriActor got angry with me and told me I never gave her enough time and that she was going to teach a Friend to ride in her wheelchair. I then challenged her to do it. She accepted and got out of her wheelchair. From standing holding herself up behind a chair she taught the Friend to drive her motorized chair. It was such a wonderful sight to behold - A wheel-bound senior teaching an able-bodied male university student to drive her electric wheelchair. This could potentially be the poster for our group. It is the most impressed I have ever been by the group's capacity for cross-cultural learning. I think this was an example of such an amazing connection between two people.

Linda Watson identifies similar camaraderie in an intergenerational orchestra she works with. "Laughter and playfulness – regular features of rehearsal breaks – allow youngsters and seniors to discover shared interest apart from music" (Watson 51).

The playfulness of G&F encourages creativity. It is an important part of our ritual that leads us into liminal space, and brings generations together to share their life experiences. Playfulness and play are dynamic concepts that become clearer through the specific case study of G&F. What now needs to be looked at is how all this playfulness is useful for the creation of theatre.

Chapter Three – The Play of *GeriActors and Friends* in Rehearsal

An analysis of the rehearsal process of G&F reveals how playfulness helps create theatre for an audience, and how it helps to build community within the group. David asked about the nature of play in our rehearsal process. He asked me, "What makes our play better one day than another?" This question led to me to ask another question: "When is our play successful?" In this chapter I work to provide answers to these questions, aiming to understand how playfulness in G&F contributes to the building of a trusting community and to the scenes we write collectively.

Successful Play of G&F: In Specific Rehearsals

There are many examples from the 2006-07 and 2007-08 seasons of moments of successful play. After watching the rehearsal footage, I selected two examples to analyze closely. I chose these because they are rehearsals in which our playfulness entered a liminal space, the unknown space where possibilities for growth and creativity emerge.

September 28, 2006: "Song Circle"

On this day, towards the end of rehearsal, we sat down and had what I call a "Song Circle." We spontaneously started singing whatever song came into our head. Many of the songs we sang together, while others were sung solo. A sharing took place across generational lines. In my journal that day, I wrote:

> I thought the song activity was great. I was impressed by how many songs we all shared in common. There was difference between the generations but not too much. It really goes to show the power that music has to unify people. These classic songs that we were singing brought us together.

This rehearsal started with a conversation about an issue that happened the week before. One of the members accused the group of being racist. This accusation came out of another GeriActor using the word "black" to describe a character in a movie. After

making the accusation, the offended member aggressively expressed his views on racism to the group, then stormed out. One of the Friends stood up to the man as he was leaving, and he made a condescending remark about her being young and not knowing anything. The member who made this accusation subsequently quit our group and was not present during the following meeting. There were a lot of raw emotions surrounding this event which threatened to split the group. We had a discussion about racism and how members of different ethnic backgrounds fit into G&F. The company as a whole came to the view that the incident the week before was not racist, and that the offended member's accusations were unfounded. This crisis helped us learn that the intergenerational group not only needs to be accepting of the other generation, it also has to be accepting of various cultural backgrounds.

Dealing with the offended member's response by having a conversation that lasted over half of the rehearsal time helped to the group to be able to spontaneously play "Song Circle". After the group discussion we played a game in which we worked in small groups and had to choose the most important word from a list: home, love, family, respect, being active, intellect, feeling, and loyalty. After each group chose on e of the words, we then created a tableau. After we shared these with the other groups, we came up with a song to go with each tableau. "Song Circle" grew directly from this game.

A game like "Song Circle" requires that the group feels safe with one another so they are willing to take risks. These risks led the group to a liminal space where they were able to experience intergenerational sharing. Members of both generations sang and shared songs. One Friend was particularly important to the success of this game, because she was a skilled singer who knew music from many different Broadway musicals. Her gift of her singing encouraged the participation of the seniors in the group. By sharing her

own talents, she encouraged the seniors to feel comfortable to share songs they knew from their lives. Her efforts during this game, and the safe space that was created through having the discussion about the crisis, encouraged the group to play "Song Circle".

On this day the game "Song Circle" successfully entered a liminal space. When a group spontaneously sang songs, they entered a territory where it is unknown who will sing next, what song will be next, who will share common love of certain music genres or artists, etc. This unknown space allowed the members of the group to grow closer to each other and helped everyone gain an understanding of one another. Every song that is shared opens a possible door to new discoveries. Each song carries with it a story or a key that unlocked some of the personal background of each individual. The music that was sung on this day helped the group understand each other. Everyone was able to see what kind of music each member liked to sing, and it was also apparent where people made musical connections. "Song Circle" is a game of discovery in which participants are able to take risks to reveal themselves, and this process leads to G&F becoming a tight-knit group.

October 12, 2006 and October 11, 2007: "Thanksgiving Game"

In both of these rehearsals we played a game we called the "Thanksgiving Game." This game is very similar to a Viola Spolin game called "Part of a Whole" (Spolin 73). In this game, a few actors play a simple activity onstage like fixing a car, planting a garden, etc. The other players then join until everyone in the room is playing the same activity. In the G&F spin on this game, the entire group joins in an improvised scene in which we play as if we are a family celebrating Thanksgiving. The purpose of this game in G&F is to allow a free improvisational space which the members can enter and play so they can sharpen their acting skills, and simultaneously discover the nature of their experience

with their own family and the families of the other members. The game allows members to get to know each other and themselves while allowing a space to improve upon their theatre skills.

There was a sharp contrast in the success of these two rehearsals. In 2006, the game was playful. The space in which we played the game was safe, and because of this, it was easy to unlock our spontaneity. It was a Thanksgiving meal shared by a family that was relaxed and fun. Everyone participated in a very simple way and this led to having the group's improvised scene flow naturally. In 2007, focus was taken by one of the members who during the improvisation said that she had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, which was a fiction. This took away from the natural flow of the game alienating a few of the GeriActors who were dealing with the effects of this disease in their day-to-day lives. It is interesting to note that there was a similarly jolting interjection in the first year but that time it did not interrupt the flow of the scene. In that improvisation one Friend made an announcement to the group that she was pregnant. The contrast of these two rehearsals helps to define the nature of our play.

Before writing this chapter I presented my research to the fall 2008 Intergenerational 407/507 class. We spoke about the difference between these two days. We focused on the different interjections. One was a pregnancy and the other was Alzheimer's disease. With the pregnancy improvisational offer the other actors could easily deal with the problem. Inside of the improvisation the family depicted was a functioning unit that could easily provide the support needed. The reason the 2006/07 season's group became a functional family was because the rehearsal happened three weeks after the eruption by the member accusing G&F of being a racist group. Because

of this there was a need for cohesiveness in the company. The crisis of pregnancy was easily dealt with by the improvised family unit.

With the offer of Alzheimer's, no matter the functioning of a family unit, the disease creates a difficult situation. The fictional family in the second season was not as unified as it was in the first season. With this in mind, it makes sense that members would feel pressured to deal with the situation and two of them had to sit out because they were uncomfortable participating - in an improvisation of a dysfunctional family dealing with Alzheimer's. The offer of Alzheimer's was made very early on in the improvisation when the scene had yet to come to a mature point. The interjection of pregnancy during the first season happened very late in the game at a point when the scene had developed and the family had shown itself to be a functioning unit. This is a key discovery in the nature of our play and to improvisational theatre. G&F needs to be functioning as a healthy unit with good communication if they will be able to comfortably enter dark or controversial territory. Any intervention that could take our group to controversial territory needs to occur at a point in the improvisation where the relationships among the characters have been firmly established. If the scene is not clearly established as a healthy unit with clear roles, this kind of offer risks alienating some of the members and stopping playfulness.

Liminality and the Play of G&F

The rehearsals with "Song Circle" and the "Thanksgiving Game" are examples of conditions that bring the company into a liminal space. Both of these games are free-flowing games that exist in the moment they are being played. They have no predetermined outcomes or known paths. They are games that encourage spontaneous, unstructured improvisation and allowed G&F to be creative. In the "Song Circle" game

the group shared songs spontaneously that they did not rehearse before hand or plan to sing that day. In the "Thanksgiving Game" the group played together to create a family gathering that flowed in the direction the group took and which was not controlled by a plan or script but was spontaneous. It is interesting to consider the contrast between the two days in which the "Thanksgiving Game" was played; only one day entered a liminal space. The day with the pregnancy intervention was playful and entered a liminal space where the group responded in a positive way that ended in everyone being supportive of their family member. With the Alzheimer's intervention the group went to a negative place that was not playful and not liminal. The reason people had to sit out was because they were uncomfortable with the uncertainty provided by the challenge of dealing with Alzheimer's disease in a dysfunctional family. It was not playful to face the challenge of dealing with this disease in a dysfunctional way. This was a blockage of playfulness that froze the group before they entered the uncertainty of liminality. In order to be able to enter a liminal space, if there is a level of controversy, G&F needs to remain playful otherwise members will be uncomfortable and not engage in play.

Play within Games and the Relationship with Story

Developing a working definition for game will be helpful to understand the nature of play for G&F. David stated that a game has rules and that people participate in any game as much as they are physically, mentally, and emotionally capable. A game has a beginning and an end (Barnet). This is supported by Huizinga who states that one of the main qualities of play is that it is limited (Huizinga 9). This means that any game includes an entry into the space where the game is being played. There is a beginning to the game-time, and an end. This shows the ritual of game. Viola Spolin offers another definition for game:

> The game is a natural group form providing the involvement and personal freedom necessary for experiencing. Games develop personal techniques and skills necessary for the game itself, through playing. Skills are developed at the very moment a person is having all the fun and excitement playing a game has to offer (Spolin 4-5).

Inside a game, players need to be free to play. Roger Caillios believe that a game needs to allow the players free response "within the limits set by the rules (Caillios 8)."

In the interviews, members identified that games are key in bringing out stories. Tim Prentki and Jan Selman, in their book *Popular Theatre in Political Culture: Britain and Canada in focus,* write that theatre games are used very carefully by facilitators to create a certain atmosphere in the group (Prentki and Selman 124). G&F feels that games are also great in bringing out the laughter and silliness which help to make the room more comfortable. Games also help members leave behind things which are happening in our lives for a period of time, allowing everyone to participate in rehearsal.

Successful Play that Leads to Story Telling

Prentki and Selman also identify that games can bring stories from the group. G&F rehearsals often take the shape of a discussion in which members share stories from their lives. As directors, we provide form to the activity of story sharing and reminiscence. In planning these activities we create games that utilize the spontaneity of each member. It is best for writing scripts if the stories are told spontaneously. A spontaneously told story works well because the story is a moment of communication between members of the company. The storyteller focuses on telling the story for the other people. This spontaneous style of storytelling is similar to performance. When sharing a story with other people one tends to tell the story with detail and focus on the characters involved in the story.

October 12, 2006 and October 1, 2007

On these two days we played a game called "Medicine Bag." I learned this game from my professor at Augustana, Paul "Sparky" Johnson. It is derived from the Aboriginal tradition of the Medicine Bag where an individual carries around their neck a bag which contains important artifacts from their life. In this game, a variety of objects are used to inspire stories spontaneously from the lives of the participants. The story is told with the whole group or in small groups.

On both of these days, right after playing this game, we broke into small groups that were intentionally intergenerational, and played a Viola Spolin game called "Scene-On-Scene" (Spolin 198). Each group selects a story that was told by one of the group members in "Medicine Bag". That person re-tells the story while the rest of the group plays the scene. This game works well in G&F. It intrinsically holds some of the important values necessary for intergenerational community theatre. In this game a person tells a story while others act it out. The players of this game not only listen to the story but also are agents in the action of embodying the story. G&F play young people, seniors, and become animals or plants, or any imaginable object. This game provides a playful, active, and sharing space where the actors spontaneously create the mise-en-scene for the storyteller. Every member of G&F has the opportunity to share a story that will be enacted. This is a reciprocal process: first, the actors play the scene and the storyteller is able to see the enacting of their story and form a new relationship with the material. Second, the actors playing the story forge a close relationship with the story and in turn with the storyteller. They are given the opportunity to listen to the story and become active agents in the story. The players take on the roles of the major characters in

the story: husband, mother, brother, son, best friend, etc. By doing so, the members of G&F grow a bond together which creates community.

Examples of Stories that Became Scenes

One element that defines the success of play is when it leads to the sharing of a story that becomes a repeatable scene in performances. That is not to say that other moments of sharing stories are unsuccessful. If a scene does not have good dramaturgical structure G&F will not use it in performance. Every story shared is valuable in bringing members of the company closer. G&F's stories can come from specific games, such as those already mentioned, but we also work from theme or sometimes a member will want to share a story. Play and playfulness lead to an atmosphere where stories are freely shared. Each rehearsal is started by a "check-in" or as I have started calling it, "GeriActors and Friends' Front Page News." This is important to establish a group dynamic where members can feel comfortable to share stories from their life whenever they see fit. The floor is always open to stories. When games are designed in which we work from theme, these themes generally emerge from discussions during the beginning check-in or in the conversations that emerge while working on other scenes.

Lean on Me

A GeriActor first shared this story with us on November 16, 2006. She told her story about moving from independent living to a care facility. G&F presented it as scene-on-scene but it became very emotional for her. Her words were powerful. The group kept playing while it was emotional and this helped the GeriActor continue to tell the story even though she was experiencing a visceral response. Everyone in the room was involved in the continued enactment of the story and her storytelling. This was the first

time she told the story. *Lean On Me* was first performed on December 6, 2006, then in the spring tour in 2007, and during the Christmas performances in 2007.

Great Escape

A Friend first told us this story on October 18, 2007. This happened while we were searching for more elements to add to a scene called *"Am I Invisible."* The scene is about the Friend and her sister's adventure of breaking their mother out of the hospital where she was recovering from brain surgery. It was first performed at the Chateau Lacombe Hotel on November 23, 2007. The scene was written and rehearsed in this five-week period. She developed this scene first with David alone, then through improvisation with the full group. She also interviewed her Mother to establish authenticity and to obtain her Mother's approval.

There is a danger in re-traumatizing the member telling the story, both in the first instance and through repetition of the telling in performances. Julie Salverson raises the concern that in some community theatre projects, participants have an experience that is not empowering. In situations where this occurs, it is often a "risky story" that will cause them to have a bad experience (Salverson 181). In the case of these two particular G&F's stories, there was little risk of re-traumatizing the members. From the moment they told their story, during the entire time we rehearsed the scene, and throughout the performances, the scene was open to changes from the storyteller. The scenes are in constant transition. Actors change from year to year and the relationship G&F has to the piece changes over time. This means that the scene is never simply a re-telling of the original event; it is a dynamic theatrical sharing of the event and the G&F's relationship to the initial event. When working on scenes, G&F constantly changes the script to ensure that an audience sees a presentation of the group's dynamic relationship with the

story. This is essential for the company. G&F performs scenes for an audience because they desire to share stories that have had an impact during the rehearsal process. The company does not only perform the story, but also the relationship to the story that they have developed through the rehearsal process. This is the reason there is little risk of re-traumatizing members who share stories. G&F do not stage only the initial story, but also the group's relationship to the story. This means that any risk of trauma from story sharing does not fall on an individual member, but is shared by the entire company.

Liminal Space: Witnessed Testimony

In his book *The Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning, and Ethics,* Roger Simon identifies that bearing witness to testimony opens an individual to be changed. He states that there is "the possibility of unfamiliar or uncanny connections" (Simon 93). He says that this occurs because there are two temporalities that intersect at the moment the individual witnesses a testimony. The temporality of the person delivering the testimony meets with the time of the group in which the testimony is taking place. Therefore, any individual witnessing this testimony will experience the interruption of their temporality which opens a third space which is a liminal and educative. Simon describes this as a "transactional sphere of public memory" (Simon 93).

GeriActors and Friends: Transactional Public Memory Group

Simon's theory of 'transactional sphere' requires that individuals are open to bearing witness to each other's testimony. G&F bear witness to each other's stories and life histories in rehearsals. Interviews with company members demonstrate that they believe G&F is a healthy community because of the fun and laughter that is shared and that members care about each other. Because of this positive atmosphere of working to create theatre, they are ready and willing to bear witness to each other's testimony. The

shared playfulness leads to a space where testimony is effectively accessed. The liminal space that occurs in play has a direct relationship to the liminal space that Simon describes.

When members of G&F share a story, they open up a space where their story can change the group. When a story enters into the group it has an effect on other members and can be used as material for a scene. This is an agreed-upon part of the ritual. When G&F enters an area where they pretend together and create scripts, they are in a liminal space where anything can happen. It is in this space that the opportunity exists for members to change. This is the most sacred moment shared as a company. When there is entry into the agreed space where G&F pretend and play together in a way that allows change as individuals, playfulness crosses into a sacred territory. This territory is sacred because the members are open to change and to be educated about themselves and the other members of the group. G&F is sacred when our group process allows individuals to change. I use the term sacred here knowing that it maybe difficult for some of my readers to accept. The process which I describe here allows the members of G&F to experience a higher realization of shared aspirations. This shared experience is something that I interpret as a spiritual realization. It may not be this way for all of the members in the company, but it is this way for some. I am troubled to include the word "sacred" in a study on playfulness and witnessing testimony because of the contentious nature of the term, but I feel I must at least pose the question to my readers. Is this process sacred? Can play, playfulness, and witnessing testimony take humans to a sacred space?

Autoethnographic Experience of Witnessing Testimony

There have been numerous occasions when I have been strongly affected by what has occurred in our rehearsals. For example, a moment in our rehearsals that had a

profound impact on me was on December 7, 2007 when we were having a discussion regarding suicide. Here is an excerpt from my journal:

> I am interested how the discussion of suicide affected me. All it was that one of the members said that 1 in 10 people that are bipolar or suffer from depression commit suicide. It got to me because I have people in my community that have been diagnosed bipolar or with depression and it scared me. I also was thinking about how my mental health affects me. Am I depressed? It took me over for a few moments. I need to heal from these things or take some action on them. It has started me thinking about them and I will see what happens.

I still carry with me a vivid memory of this day. I remember that when the GeriActor stated the statistic 1 in 10 I thought about my friends and family who suffer from these mental illnesses, and what it would be like if one of them were to commit suicide. I was swept away to my own place. I was physically in the room but my mind was in a different place. I became very uncomfortable and focused on my individual struggle with this issue. It was only when another member of the company noticed I was not listening and put their hand on my shoulder that I came back into the conversation. I believe that being a member of G&F always has a level of risk to it because of the liminal space we enter into that allows for us to change. This experience has caused much reflection. I now feel that I am better equipped to meet any challenges I face in regard to the mental health of my friends and family. The educative space that Simon theorized about is achieved in our company. We are a community that has the power to change individual members.

In nearly every interview the participant recognized that their involvement with G&F has helped to change them a little. One of the GeriActors said that in his time with the company, he has become less judgmental of people and specifically less judgmental:

> I have become less judgmental. I have often been accused of being judgmental of people. I now have freedom in my thinking and my

> tolerance of other people. I used to have a dim view of people that were divorced. I don't believe that any more even though I have been married for fifty years this year. I now believe that some relationships should have never started and they start on the wrong foot and I wouldn't want to live for fifty years in misery. I have become more tolerant and less judgmental.

Although members of G&F may not always be able to articulate the changes they have individually experienced, I can see these changes. Members articulately discuss issues that G&F once considered taboo and the company collectively breaks through into new and exciting themes for scenes on a regular basis. I see both individual and collective growth in G&F; individuals become more open to talking about dead relatives, and the group has gained the sensitivity to talk about topics like religion and sexuality.

Journal Entry about Success

To conclude this chapter I include a full entry from one day of my journal. This took place while I was still a student in the Intergenerational 407/507 class. At the time when I wrote this entry I had been with the company for only five rehearsals.

> **October 17, 2006**
>
> One of the major moments that I felt that feeling of success was when a GeriActor shared the story about her Grandmother walking her down the railroad tracks. What I felt occurred at this moment was that this GeriActor shared something that was very personal to her to give us a window into her past. There were two great identifiable effects. She has been given the opportunity to recollect this moment of her life which no doubt reflects some therapeutic purpose that will cause some sort of growth in the GeriActor. Also, any member of the group was given the opportunity to hear her marvelous story and see a window into her personal culture. We could also add that the GeriActors may end up with a great scene from this story as being another part of the success of this moment, although it was not felt at that time. Success for us in this moment would be described as giving any member of our group the freedom to share a personal story that causes growth within the individual and gives the group an opportunity to know more about the individual; which will cause growth in the group through each individual taking on the responsibility of reflecting on the individual's story. We

cannot assume that the effect would be therapeutic for everyone although we can guess that it would be therapeutic for some.

I believe a major part of why this moment took place is we had gotten to a moment where we were "playing".

This playful mood has been created because of a number of factors. As a group we are close and comfortable with one another. This has been created by the experiences we share together. We have formed a community. Through games like the one played before this and through our traumatic experience with a member's eruption. Also, because we have worked on creating a playful feeling with the group. We have played the thanksgiving game and other warm-up games that have led to us a place where we play with each other. When we get to this area we can be comfortable with being spontaneous.

Success for this could be described as giving the members of the group an opportunity to share a story that will cause growth for themselves and the group and to give any member of the group the opportunity to assist in that growth to better themselves and the initial storytellers.

Even before I had become Assistant Director for the company or had completed any critical research on G&F, I could sense these elements were key to the creation of the theatre we were working to achieve. I believe this knowledge exists in all of the members of the company.

Chapter Four – Playfulness of *GeriActors and Friends* in Performance

The members of *GeriActors and Friends* are able to bring playfulness to their performances. In this chapter, I analyze two specific performances. In the interviews with the members of G&F, I asked what some of their favorite moments were over the two seasons. In nearly every interview they refer to *Workshop Performances*. Here is a quote from one interview: "Good moments have been the workshops that we've done with people outside of our group. Watching them see our fun and joining in. These have been good moments." *Workshop Performances* are formatted similarly to rehearsals and include audience participation. Members of G&F stated that in addition to the workshop format, they enjoyed the performances we gave to large audiences. First, I look at a *Workshop Performance* that took place on June 3, 2008 at the *Creative Age Festival Symposium.* Next, I analyze a performance of our scene *Am I Invisible* at the *Celebration Showcase* of the *Community Arts Celebration* in the Winspear Centre on March 16, 2008. I choose these two performances because they represent two different styles of performance of G&F.

There are two main goals of the performances of G&F. The first is to transmit the social knowledge, memories, and the identity of the members of the company. Diane Taylor, in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas,* identifies that performances can act as "vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity" (Taylor 2). In the organization and scripting of our performances, we try to achieve these "acts of transfer". The second goal is the desire to produce theatre that is entertaining for an audience. Arthur Strimling, in writing about his New York based company *Roots and Branches,* quotes legendary jazz musician Louis Armstrong, who stated, "There's only two kinds of music; good and bad"

(Strimling 124). He believes the same is true of theatre. He writes, "Bad theater does nothing but undermine the values we promote" (Strimling 124). I agree with this sentiment, and G&F works hard to master their art and produce theatre that entertains, provokes, and intellectually engages our audiences.

Workshop Performance: June 3, 2008

The goal of a *Workshop Performance* is to re-create the atmosphere of the rehearsals of G&F. I remember the meeting where David and I first worked out the format for this style of performance. We planned the structure of the premiere *Workshop Performance* over a coffee at the High Level Diner. This first event took place on December 6, 2006, and over the two seasons we hosted four similar events. For this chapter, I focus on the *Workshop Performance* given on June 3, 2008. My analysis of this event is based upon my memory of the day, the video recording of the event, and research which includes the interviews with the company.

This *Workshop Performance* started with a game we call *Bombaya*. I learned the game from Augustana University College Professor Paul Johnson. A song is sung in Spanish in which there are two sections: a verse and a chorus. Before the game starts, we hand out balls to everyone in the room and ask that everyone sit in a circle close together. After the song has been taught to the group the game starts. During the chorus section the balls are passed around the circle in one direction and then during the verse the participants hold on to the balls and keep rhythm with them. In watching this game on the video I am surprised to see the difference in the atmosphere of the room at the beginning and at the end. At the beginning, some people are reserved but by the end every person in the room looks as if they are at a fun party. This is the function of *Bombaya*. It works as

an icebreaker to open the audience to the energy of G&F. This experience leads me to ask: why does this game work so well?

Its success is due to a number of factors. The balls we use are light in weight and brightly colored and are exchanged between people to a rhythmic song. The game is very engaging and active, and our company knows it well. Our audience, for this performance, was approximately thirty people. Our company, on this day, was about ten performers which means that one out of four people playing the game were familiar with the game. Also, failure is as much fun as success because chasing the balls that hit the ground may be more fun than a "proper" exchange. It is about having fun and engaging in a game of passing the ball while singing a song in a language unfamiliar to nearly all of the participants. Because the song is in another language, the participants are allowed to forget about singing correctly or on tune and just sing the song, focusing on passing the ball and having fun.

Next we sang *Hole in the Bucket.* This folk song is familiar to most of our audiences. It is about a squabble between a husband and a wife over a bucket with a hole in it. Because of this, the group was split into two. On one side were all the men and on the other were all the women. In this group, and every other one with which we have played this game, the women greatly outnumbered the men. The atmosphere here was rowdy, similar to a sing-along at a camp-fire or in a bar. The gender split works well because it creates competition based upon the archetypal relationship of men and women that helps with the energy and playfulness in the room.

After the playful energy in the room was created, the workshop audience split into four groups. Then each group chose what they felt was the most important of four words: family, health, wisdom, and independence. Time was given for each group to discuss

their choice. Then each group created a tableau image to represent their word. After giving time to work on the tableau each group thought of a song to accompany their tableau. The first group sang a song they had written. The words were "on my own and never alone" and their tableau was a group in a large hug. The second group's song was *Lean on Me,* and in their tableau they were leaning on each other. During the performance of their song the whole room clapped along. The third group used the familiar melody *Love and Marriage* with the words "health" and "independence" and their tableau was of a horse and carriage. Everyone laughed at this performance. The last group sang the words, "We share the world of Wisdom in our Hands" to the melody of *We've got the Whole World in our Hands* and their tableau was them sitting in a circle passing a ball around. Once again the group clapped along with the performance. After each performance the audience guessed which of the four words the group had chosen. The word they chose is not as important as the consideration of the concepts and the energy created by the performances. The sharing that takes place during this section is important for the experience of the audience because it gives them a glimpse into G&F's creative process. It is important for G&F to share its creative process because it helps the audience join in the activity of creation with the company. This participation enables them to view the scenes in a way that helps them build and reflect on their own experiences. This also helps the audience to be in a space where they are not only watching the theatre performance but also remembering stories from their lives of which they are reminded during the performance.

After this step, G&F performed scenes from their repertoire. They entered singing the song from *Bombaya*. The audience knew this song from the workshop, so they were able to sing along. On this day G&F performed three scenes: *Am I Invisible, Sanctuary,*

and *Alberta Hospital*. (The scripts for *Am I Invisible* and *Alberta Hospital* scenes are included as appendices.) Performing these scenes after having the audience enter into a rehearsal format with G&F and play with the company allows for a deeper sharing of knowledge and memories because both the audience and company has gone through the process of creating together. This experience allows for a profound sharing.

After the performance, I facilitated a discussion with the audience and our group. David told the audience that this was a mini-version of our regular show because this was a shortened performance. Normally a *Workshop Performance* would last two hours and this was at a symposium in which we were scheduled for only a one-hour time slot. A normal part of a *Workshop Performance* is to have a coffee break in the middle just as in rehearsals, but that was not possible in this context. This discussion period was a mixing of intellectual reflection and light-hearted joking which parallels the atmosphere of many of the discussions G&F shares as a company.

The nature of a *Workshop Performance* differs from much contemporary theatre. A more conventional style of theatre performance does not have the level of audience participation that takes place in the *Workshop Performance*. Tim Prentki and Jan Selman, in their book:

> The movement of contemporary popular theatre is towards greater and greater degrees of participation; an increasingly uncertain blurred distinction between performer and audience as well as an increasingly uncertain demarcation between what constitutes a theatrical space, a space of fiction and public spaces of daily reality (Prentki and Selman 158).

A parallel exists between what Prentki and Selman write and the *Workshop Performance*. G&F perform in an unorthodox theatre space; in this case, it was in a conference room in the Telus Centre at the University of Alberta campus. The scenes

performed change because of the theatre space and the relationship created with the audience. The audience relates to the scene work in a more intimate fashion than conventional theatre because they participate in the creation of the event by playing games, creating tableaus, and singing. Viola Spolin states that an audience should have the same opportunity to have as personal an experience as the actor does in a theatrical presentation (Spolin 13). G&F achieves this in a *Workshop Performance* because creation is shared between audience and actor during the games and tableaus section of the performance. Cultural theorist Diane Taylor believes that "…the production of knowledge is always a collective effort…" (Taylor xx). In the *Workshop Performance,* an intellectual and creative energy is shared between G&F and the audience. G&F does not act as an expert group who puts on a show for an audience. They act as a conduit to display the knowledge, energy, and understanding of the collective group assembled for that event. Here is a description of the *Workshop Performance* from a GeriActor:

> My grand daughter is very imaginative as all three-year-olds are. We play hiding games when I am with her. It's a very similar feeling that I have when I am with G&F. We play together and we are free to use our imagination and to be on the spot and change things as needed and the tableau and the games that we play at the workshops with other people who come to see our workshops and our scenes. You can see them drop away their inhibitions and suddenly be a part of our acting group and within ten to fifteen minutes their childlike side emerges and they take part in the drama with us. I think it is a very healthy thing for people to use their imagination. I just think that imaginary play is a very healthy human experience and I am honored to be a part of G&F.

Phillip Taylor, in his book *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community,* writes about the style of theatre that he believes to be of value: "Participants are having an experience while simultaneously understanding the nature of the experience they are having" (Taylor 6). The audience of a *Workshop Performance* is in this state of experiencing a transfer of social knowledge and memory, and at the same

time, they are able to analyze critically the experience they are having in the *Workshop Performance* and critically analyze experiences from their own lives.

Roger Simon, in his book *The Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning, and Ethics*, discusses two different sensibilities that one can have when one witnesses the testimony of another person. The two sensibilities are the spectatorial and the summoned (Simon 92). A *spectatorial sensibility* is described as "one who listens and watches." This is not limited to these two senses, but is evoked via sight and sound to cause a "larger, pervasive organization of perceptual engagement" with the testimony of another. This implies that the witness will understand the testimony and create their own meaning from it which will "evoke thought, feeling, and judgment" (Simon 92). In the spectatorial sensibility the witness is not obligated to act upon the testimony. Simon describes the *summoned sensibility* as an embodied understanding that is "incarnated in notions of touch rather than sight or sound." A summoned sensibility brings the witness to a space where they must consider their "response-ability" to the testimony (Simon 92). This means that the spectator must consider the course of action they can take in their life during and after witnessing the testimony.

The audience of any theatre or any person who tells a story has the opportunity to engage in the activity of witnessing a testimony. How does the audience response of a *Workshop Performance* fit into this theory? Are there moments where they shift from spectatorial to summoned sensibility or vice versa? I would argue that the audience of a *Workshop Performance* embodies both sensibilities outlined by Simon. When G&F asks the audience to play the games *Bombaya* and *Hole in the Bucket,* the audience gets up on their feet to share an experience. Then at the moment they are asked to create tableaus, they enter a summoned sensibility. In the *Workshop Performance*, G&F asks people to

share what is important to them and to perform a tableau and a song. It is simple but they are engaging in a summoned sensibility. They are listening to each other and are in the position where they have to take some action based upon that sharing. After, when the audience is asked to watch the scenes, they are given the opportunity to engage with G&F's material with a spectatorial sensibility. They can relax into a position where they are using only their eyes and ears to witness testimony. But I believe something unique happens in a portion of the spectators. Because they are in a summoned space during the early portion of the performance, before they sit and watch the scenes, many of them remain in a summoned sensibility because of the response-ability they felt during the tableau and song-sharing exercise. Since the audience has felt this response-ability, they now take the scenes performed and consider how they affect their life in a profound and meaningful way that may not otherwise be possible with a different community theatre group.

Diane Taylor identifies two different ways to transmit knowledge: through identity, and through memory. She writes about the *archive* and the *repertoire*. To her, the *archive* is the form of transmission that is taken through any recorded means, whether that is video recording, sound recording, or most frequently, written materials (Taylor 16). The *repertoire* is enacted by embodied memory: "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all of those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge" (Taylor 20). The *repertoire* consists of live embodied actions that are traditional and stored in the body. In performance, these actions are acted out as "forms handed down from the past" that "are experienced as the present" (Taylor 24). She calls for a focusing on embodied practices that transmit social knowledge,

memory, and identity, because she believes there is too large a focus on the *archive,* and because of this, important acts of transfer are being ignored (Taylor 16).

In the *Workshop Performance,* the acting company works to transmit social knowledge, memory, and identity through embodied acts that are both shared with and performed for the audience. At every point through the performance, members of G&F are using our bodies to share a collective experience. Games are played together, then tableaus and songs are performed, and finally the acting company performs scenes for the audience. In the *Workshop Performance,* there is a focus on sharing the embodied actions of the *repertoire* that Taylor describes. The *Workshop Performance* places the primary focus of both audience and performer upon the embodied action of playing games and performing theatrical stories. This focus on embodied actions is important for the mutual experiences of the audience and actors. Using the embodied acts of the *repertoire,* the participants of the *Workshop Performance* join together in a form of spontaneous communitas because of the shared embodied experience.

In the chapter on the rehearsals of G&F, I proposed that G&F is a transactional public memory group where individuals come together to share testimony and create theatre scenes from the testimonies. The same process that brings the group to this sharing of testimony in rehearsal also occurs in the *Workshop Performance.* The audience is willing to bear witness to the scenes of G&F, and is open to being changed. As in the sharing of testimony explained earlier, the temporality of the audience comes into contact with the shared temporality of G&F and opens a liminal space that is educative, where audience and theatre groups are "encountering historical memories on terms that might teach us anew how to live in the present" (Simon 93-94). The audience and the acting company encounter each other in a space where memory is not a private act but one that

is shared as a "social gesture" (Simon 101). The *Workshop Performance* changes how memory is generally viewed. Memory is shared in a public forum where any person who is present as a witness can be changed by the scenes that the company performs. Any audience member has the opportunity to take on the same response-ability as any member of the company. Therefore, G&F, in their *Workshop Performance*, creates a theatrical experience that is an educative space where the audience may transform their perception of social knowledge, memory, and identity.

***Am I Invisible:* March 16, 2008**

There is a relationship between the *Workshop Performance* and a more standard presentational performance G&F gave as a part of the *Celebration Showcase* for the *Community Arts Celebration* on March 16, 2008. For that Sunday evening performance G&F had an eight-minute time-slot in a two-hour-long variety show to do a performance for an audience of around eight hundred people. For this event, G&F performed their scene *Am I Invisible*. This performance, as with a *Workshop Performance*, brought the audience to a liminal space. I know, from the reactions many shared with me after the show and from watching the audience during the performance that the audience was brought to the unknown educative space. There was much laughter in the audience during the performance. They understood every joke and they were having fun and enjoying themselves. The comments I received after the performance are similar to those following a *Workshop Performance.* The audience was brought to a space where they were reflecting on their own lives and how the material presented onstage connected with their experiences. On this evening, G&F shared the stage with professional musicians and other community art groups. Professionals are sometimes able to bring an audience to the educative, reflective space by using their technical skills; however, in a *Workshop*

Presentation by G&F, the audience gets to a liminal space by engaging with them through embodied play. The question that comes out of this is: how did G&F lead this audience to an unknown, liminal space considering they have only the acting skills of a community theatre group, and considering that there was no audience participation as in the *Workshop Performance*? I believe a number of factors led the audience to this space. In the Winspear Centre, the acoustics are precise. Some of our performers had microphones to ensure that every word spoken onstage was heard by the audience. The mise-en-scene achieved by G&F on this day with the scene *Am I Invisible* was a mimetic presentation of our group process. By mimetic presentation I mean a (re)-production of G&F's group process created as a performance. The energy and spirit of the mimetic presentation performed is separate from the group's rehearsal process, but is a (re)-production of the group process done in a performative way. I place 're' in parentheses because the performance is not a duplicate copy of a rehearsal but a performance that (re)-presents the rehearsal process of G&F.

The performance started with two MCs introducing our group. G&F then entered dancing and singing the song from the game *Bombaya.* This gave the opening a sense of playfulness. Having G&F enter singing and dancing was designed not only for the audience to see the intergenerational group having fun together, but to provide the actors, who were nervous about the performance, the opportunity to warm up and get comfortable onstage. The importance of play to the performance style came out in most of the interviews with the members. Many stated that play is important because it centers the actors during performances. One GeriActor said that play helps the group to not seem artificial in performance. What is interesting about the inclusion of *Bombaya* was that the decision to include it was made only five or ten seconds before going onstage. Another

student director had suggested it to me earlier and I had said no for a reason I cannot remember. After having time to reconsider her suggestion, and while the MCs were introducing the G&F, the other student director and I told the group that we would sing and dance our way onstage. It ended up working well and I am glad it happened because it calmed the actors' nerves and set them up to give a strong performance.

The scene is split into six sections: a line of actors confronting and spatially close to the audience, an improvised unit, a transitional unit, another improvised section, a transitional song, and a final group conversation section. In the first section, the group stands across the stage in a line and introduces the scene. Pam Schweitzer calls this style "out-front" (Schweitzer 34). Each actor has short lines that demand fast delivery and high energy. The company says that the scene that is about how, as a person ages, they often find themselves becoming invisible in society. Young people don't notice seniors, men stop looking at aging women and for the students, being often in a class of four hundred people makes them feel invisible. After this section, a GeriActor moves to the front of the stage and describes an experience when she went to get gas while her daughter was with her and the gas jockey paid attention to the daughter and not to the mother.

This first section is a mimetic presentation of the conversations G&F have as a company. At the beginning of every rehearsal, and when moments come up in rehearsal that are worth discussing, the company has long conversations. In these discussions everyone has the opportunity to share and often, one person will share a story. This is exactly what is presented onstage. Everyone in the group has a line to engage the audience in the conversation about invisibility and then one GeriActor tells the audience a story about her personal experience with feeling invisible.

The second section is an improvised representation of the scene where the daughter receives all of a gas jockey's attention while he ignores the mother. At the end of this scene, the gas jockey and the daughter arrange to go to a dance together. In the script you can see that there are written stage directions but they are only there as a guide. Every time this scene is performed it is a little different. This scene is always very playful and what helps to contribute to that liveliness is that one of our male GeriActors plays the role of the gas jockey who is a teenage boy. He enjoys playing a younger age and really has fun with the role. This shows that even though they are seniors they are still young inside. In the interviews, a Friend identified that her favourite moment is when the older actors play young characters. Since this scene is always different it allows all of the actors onstage to playfully improvise and not worry about making a mistake. The audience on this occasion found humour in this improvised section. As part of the improvised section, the gas jockey sings, "I'm in the Mood for Love," a familiar song that the audience recognizes.

The third section is a transition in which another female GeriActor tells a story about her experience of invisibility with her daughters. In her story she goes shopping for shoes at the mall with her two daughters and is ignored by the young shoe salesman. Next, there is a second improvised section. At this performance the two daughters were played by a Friend and a GeriActor and the shoe salesman was played by me. Once again, it is rewarding for an audience to see an older woman playing the role of teenage girl. The daughter being played by the GeriActor is fun to watch because of the stereotype society has of seniors being slower or less energetic. She has to act energetically and be flighty and light just as a young girl. With both instances of GeriActors playing young characters an audience enjoys these acts because the actors are

willingly lowering their status from being dignified wise elders to becoming bumbling teenagers. It is comic for an audience to watch an actor lower their status. Our actors also really enjoy playing younger characters.

The fifth section is a transitional section that uses a song. At the end of the improvised section the young women make fun of the older women, saying that "the boys are looking at us now." They then sing a pop song from the 1950s, "Standing on the Corner." After this, G&F enter into the final section where they return to the single line across the front of the stage that began the performance and the company reiterates the conversation, only this time the company talks about ways to challenge the ideas surrounding invisibility and fight to remain visible. The scene ends on a song: "We're Here Because We're Here", which is adapted from the play *The Hostage* by Brendan Behan.

Philip Taylor writes about a "state of *metaxis*" that occurs in community theatre groups. He believes *metaxis* exists "when a dialogue occurs between the real and the fictional world (Taylor 6)." After the improvised section with the gas jockey, the GeriActor who told the story has the line, "That's not what really happened, but that is how it felt." This line shows that G&F's improvised theatre is a heightening of a past event. There is a distancing between the theatrical and personal experience with the story. In the case of this scene, the distancing is achieved in a humorous way. In the interviews with the company, two of the seniors said that a skill of G&F is that they develop scenes that are sad, yet they do not crush the audience because of the humor that is used.

Pam Schweitzer writes, "in a typical reminiscence theatre show, musical content will constitute up to a quarter of the play" (Schweitzer 49). This is true of the performance of *Am I Invisible*. In this 10-minute performance there were four songs:

Bombaya, I'm in the Mood for Love, Standing on the Corner, and *We're Here Because We're Here*. Music is an important part of our process and performance, because G&F have fun singing together in rehearsal, and the audience enjoys engaging in the communal act of singing.

This scene is a strong mimetic presentation of G&F's group process. It was written and staged in a form in which there was a direct link between the mise-en-scene and the rehearsal process of G&F. Major elements of the rehearsal process are staged for an audience which gives them an impression of the playfulness shared by the company. The goal is to allow the audience to join in the fun G&F has as a group, and with this scene on this day the company was able to do that. G&F combined the elements of group discussion, singing, intergenerational communication, and playfulness to create a scene on the theme of seniors' invisibility.

Pam Schweitzer identifies that the audience of the theatre projects with which she has worked engage in the act of reminiscence (Schweitzer 25). After a show, audience members feel the need to walk up to the performers and tell the stories from their lives of which they were reminded while watching. This act also happens after any performance by G&F. It is because elements of the rehearsal process of the company are used to engage the audience. G&F invite audience members to reminisce with them. When the audience watches G&F, they are reminded of their own life experiences because the actors onstage are similar to themselves, in that they are not professionals. In both performances, the *Workshop Performance* and *Am I Invisible* in the Winspear Centre, audience members were taken to a place where they entered an educative space in which they reflected on their own lives. Audiences are given the opportunity to reminiscence and tell stories just as the members of the G&F do. Anytime the company performs,

audiences have the opportunity to be honorary members. Both styles of G&F performances contain elements of their rehearsal process. Because of the exposure of rehearsal techniques in performance, audiences have the opportunity to experience the same transformation.

Conclusion – What can be learned from the Playfulness of *GeriActors and Friends*?

When I started researching this thesis I had not researched playfulness. I only had a sense that the playfulness of G&F was important to examine. Now, after looking closely at the two seasons, I have constructed a theoretical understanding of the function of playfulness in G&F and how it helps the company enter a liminal space. I have also learned how this process is not only important in G&F, but also in life. In researching both thesis and my personal history I have found that playfulness occupies a central role. During difficult situations, playfulness can make communication easier.

In each of my personal stories in the opening chapter there is a quality of playfulness. If we look to the story of my cousin at my Grandma's funeral, we see that when times are difficult it is possible to communicate using humor and by being playful. This approach to difficult subjects is similar to the communication style in rehearsals of G&F. In G&F, playfulness and games are used to create a safe space where members have the ability to talk about difficult subjects. This discovery is important for my life and my work with G&F. I am going to seek out opportunities for play and ensure that playfulness remains a part of my life.

The next question is: who could benefit from knowing the theories of playfulness leading to liminality? Other community theatre groups could make use of the theories in this thesis. I believe it would be useful for other community theatre practitioners to analyze playfulness in their work. I have identified five benefits of the play and playfulness of G&F.

Playfulness is able to help members of G&F build scenes. Directors of the company use games that draw out the playfulness of the group to find themes and structure for scripts. This is an indirect way for the members to write scenes. This

approach works well with a community theatre group because members do not feel pressure - they only have to play the game. Games have a natural way of bringing groups to a place where they share their thoughts and stories with each other to help the directors and performers write scenes.

The games G&F play help the members learn acting skills. Just as children play to learn skills for later in life, G&F play to learn skills for onstage. Skills are gained as result of playing the game. The primary focus is playing the game and the secondary focus is to gain acting skills. This works well with a community theatre group because most of the actors in the company have never had acting training. Games are an easy and enjoyable way to develop technical performance skills.

Playfulness in G&F is essential to the creation of safe space in the rehearsal process. In ideally functioning play, participants are not at risk. In rehearsal and performance, participants expose personal information. It is therefore important that there is safe space to do so. Play is good for creating conditions where members of G&F are comfortable sharing stories with one another because they have formed a community. G&F engages in normative communitas. They are a group of people who meet on a regular basis to come together and play. G&F is a community in which playfulness is essential to the safe space in rehearsals and performance.

For G&F, it is important that the rehearsal process is fun. Playfulness creates the fun for G&F. Rehearsals are fun when the company is playful while scenes are built. When these scenes are then performed, the actors bring the fun energy that they generated in rehearsals. This helps untrained actors when they are onstage. Actors in a community theatre group are playful in rehearsal and they bring this energy to the

performances. (A.M.s sentence in this paragraph about how it is fun and they return weekly because it is a recreational activity)

Lastly, playfulness helps bring out multiple points of view. In play, G&F members feel comfortable expressing their opinions about the scenes on which they are working in rehearsal. Members feel comfortable sharing their point of view on subjects that affect their personal lives. Play helps G&F write scenes that allow the complexity of issues to be represented. Every issue in the scenes of G&F are developed using play.

Playfulness has been important in the intergenerational communication in G&F. Play creates or develops a level playing field. Play occurs in the imagination; in the imagination both parties playing together are equal. In fact, play occurs in a state of mutual admiration and respect. The older generation admires the younger generation's ability to use their bodies, and the younger generation admires the older generation's knowledge of the world and their ability to deal with problems. In play, members accept the otherness of each other's generation. Sometimes disability is a component of this otherness. In play, this difference becomes a part of the game. Think back to the example I gave of the woman teaching an able-bodied man to ride in her motorized wheelchair. Her disability became part of the playfulness of G&F.

An important question coming out of the play between generations is: can playfulness work to bring together two different groups in another context? An example would be in an intercultural project. I cannot yet answer this question, but I will allow these ideas to influence future projects on which I work.

At the conclusion of this thesis, I feel that I should address the future challenges that I see ahead for G&F. In conducting my research and my continued work with the company, it is important for the company to write strong scripts. The actors in G&F are

untrained, and for them to be able to experience success in performance, the scripts need to be well written, with authentic dialogue, clear meaning, and effective structure. The actors come up with good stories and authentic dialogue, but the process of turning these into effective scenes remains a difficult task, and not one that the actors themselves are able to solve at this time. The directors of G&F need to be able to take the stories and dialogue from the participants and put them into effective scripts for performance. The directors have had success constructing scripts from the members' stories and dialogue but it is a challenge every time. Perhaps there is a way that the directors of G&F could utilize the playfulness of the company and develop games that would focus on structuring scripts using play and game. It would be effective if the company as a collective was able to construct these scripts collectively instead of the directors taking the material and creating the scripts. This will be a challenge in the coming years for the company.

After researching and writing this thesis, I have two suggestions for other people that are involved in any type of community theatre. First, be sure to utilize the powerful energy of play and playfulness. Since the discovery that play and playfulness could be more strategically utilized in rehearsals, G&F experienced growth in members and reached a higher profile in Edmonton. It would be useful for any theatre practitioner to analyze play and playfulness in their work to see if it already exists and how it can be best used. Second, I suggest looking for ways to encourage a group's entry into liminal space. In G&F, this method of planning is useful because we now have a sharper idea of the condition from which the best material is born. Now we try to use games and activities that cause entry into the liminal space. It would be useful for other companies to check if their activities already encourage members to enter this state. I believe that groups benefit from deliberately designed activities which aim to facilitate members to

enter productive, unknown, and creative territory. Potential pay-offs from this liminal atmosphere are the creation of material and richer group cohesion.

After discovering and highlighting the value of playfulness in G&F, I have reflected on the importance of playfulness in the day-to-day lives of humans. Is playfulness always present? Is playfulness an essential force of life? Do humans play enough? How can I play more? It is important for every person to reflect on playfulness in our lives. I learned this from G&F. This is a lesson that is useful not only for other community theatre groups - every person should seek out opportunities to play, have fun, and be happy.

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Appendix A

AM I INVISIBLE? – March 16, 2008

GeriActor 1: Ladies and Gentlemen
GeriActor 2: The first scene is called
GeriActor 3: Am I invisible?
All: **What did you say?**
GeriActor 3: **AM I INVISIBLE?**

Friend 1: There comes a time in all of our lives
GeriActor 4: When we become invisible.
GeriActor 5: When people don't see us.
GeriActor 6: People like bus drivers.
GeriActor 3: Teenagers.
GeriActor 7: Social workers.
GeriActor 8: Grandchildren.
GeriActor 7: When the doctors speak to my daughter and not me.
GeriActor 9: When I'm in Alberta Hospital.
Friend 1: When men stop looking.
GeriActor 6: And pretty girls don't smile anymore.
GeriActor 8: When no one asks me to dance.
GeriActor 5: When grocery clerks ignore us.
GeriActor 8: And children don't call.
Friend 2: When my parents don't call.
Friend 3: In a class of 400, you know what I mean?
GeriActor 3: Yeah!
GeriActor 1: And no one is listening.
(All: make game of…"huh? What did you say?")

Scene One:

Am I Invisible?

Jane I first felt invisible at 10:43am on July 12, 1979

when…(*Joyce is seated in a car next to her daughter. Gas attendant is waiting beside the station Jane is standing beside each other as narrators to the story.)*

Jane: ...When I was driving my daughter to her summer job at Coronation Pool. You know, the one by Westmount…
we had to stop at a gas station first because my gas tank was getting low. The young whipper snapper pumping gas never even looked at me. He paid far more attention to my sixteen-year-old daughter than he did to pumping gas.

(Jake speaks directly to Lisa without paying any attention to Joyce who has to work to get Jake's attention. Jake finally listens and starts to pump the gas while still paying more attention to Lisa.

Jake sings a love song while attempting to pump gas. He then has to ask to pop the cap for the gas in the front seat, instead of waiting he goes over to the passenger side and reaches over Lisa to do it. Jake is now able to pump the gas.

Joyce then attempts to pay by credit card Jake comes to the passenger side again to ask Lisa to the dance. He finally gives his attention Joyce and she is allowed to pay.

***Lisa:** I think I have a date!*
***Joyce:** I don't think so!*

Instead of going directly back to finish the transaction he washes the window in front of Lisa while flirting with her. He finally goes to ring in the sale.

When he brings back the receipt to sign he gives it to Lisa. Joyce takes it and signs while the gas attendant continues to flirt with Lisa and asks her to the dance.

Joyce works to get his attention again and this time demands that he walk from the passenger side to the driver side to get the signed copy. He receives the copy.)

Jake: See you at the dance.
Joyce: No you won't.

The Joyce and Lisa drive away while the gas attendant waves good-bye

Jane: That isn't really what happened. He was much more subtle. I would have never let my daughter behave like that. But that' how it felt…being put on the back burner…

Emma: You know Jane I had a similar experience. I needed some shoes so I took my daughters shopping. It was rare because my daughters would rarely be caught dead shopping with me. They were in their hot pants and I was more conservatively dressed. We went into the shoe store. I was looking around the store to see if there was a pair that would be appropriate. I was working to get the attention of the shoe salesman, but he was too busy looking after my daughters.

Joyce, Larisa and Harriett walk into the shoe store. Larisa and Harriett go wildly running around the store looking at the shoes.

Joyce: Now girls you realize we're only buying shoes for me today. We can't afford……..

Greg comes into the store and walks by Joyce and goes straight to help Larisa and Harriett. He gets their sizes and starts to go to the back room. Joyce stops him and tells him her shoe size. He proceeds to the backroom and the Joyce and the daughters sit down

Harriett and Larisa: Yeah yeah. We're just looking Mom.

Greg: Hello…….

Joyce: Young man…young man…*I need a size eight.*

Greg: Hi. Those shoes look good.

Larisa: Can I try these in a size 7? *We're just gonna try them on.*

(Greg returns and gives shoes to the two daughters. He does not have any for the Joyce. The girls try on their shoes and the Salesman only pays attention to them. He tells them to walk around. Joyce works to get his attention again to tell him to go grab a pair of shoes to try on and that she is the only person that will be buying shoes today.

The Salesman goes to the back to grab her shoes. When he returns, he has his arms full with shoeboxes and kneels in front of the girls. Joyce tries to get his attention)

Joyce: Young man …..excuse me. Am I invisible?

Joyce, Emma and Jane: **Am I invisible?**

Larisa and Harriett: Yes! You are! Invisible! The boys are looking at us now.

Larisa, Harriett, Penelope, Christina, Lisa *sing*:

Standing on the corner, watching all the girls go by

Standing on the corner, giving all the girls the eye.
Brother you can't go to jail for what you're thinking.
Give it a whirl Give it a try. Try standing on the corner
watching all the girls, watching all the girls, watching all the
girls go by. (*moment with men standing on the corner*)

All line up one behind one another say a line and move downstage in opposite directions.

Friend 1: There is a time in all of our lives

Friend 2: When we could become invisible

GeriActor 1: But I'm not.

GeriActor 2: Nor am I.

GeriActor 3: Me neither.

GeriActor 2: My friend's invisible and she likes it.

GeriActor 4: Sometimes I'd like to be invisible.

GeriActor 5: And I still smile at pretty girls, like you…..*points.*

GeriActor 6: If people don't look at me, I run 'em over.

GeriActor 5: And like you and you and hi, you over there.

Friend 3: I'm not invisible when I'm on stage.

Friend 1: I'm not invisible when I'm silly.

GeriActor 6: Even as a child I wasn't invisible.

GeriActor 7: I'm not invisible when I'm crazy.

GeriActor 8: I but in so I'm not invisible.

GeriActor 9: I say what's on my mind so I'm not invisible.

GeriActor 2: If you don't look quick you might miss us.

Friend 2: We're here.

GeriActor 3: Take notice.

All: *sing*

We're here because we're here because we're here
because we're here.
We're here because we're here because
we are NOT invisible.

Appendix B

Alberta Hospital

Frannie. Dennis. Driver. Other people as patients

Group of patients smoking in a tight group DR.

Car set up DL. Four chairs and two (cardboard) wheels

Introduction This is part of Frannie's story

Frannie When I was first taken into Alberta Hospital
(It was an old building)
I was very sad.
One day I was in a room
Just like a dungeon
Where we all smoked

A man came up to me. I found out later his name was Dennis.

Dennis So, what are you here for?

Frannie They tell me I have manic depression

Dennis Me too. I have manic depression…we're the cream of the crop.

Frannie You've got to be kidding

Dennis The cream of the crop. Imagine you're a car.

Frannie I don't know anything about cars

Dennis You know what a '53 pick up is…a Chevy pick up?

Frannie Yeah

Dennis Any old mechanic can work on a 53 pick up. But we're like fancy German automobiles; we need fine tuning - only the best doctors for us

Frannie I'd never thought of that. I smiled for the first time since I'd been there.

Frannie Then he told me this story.

Frannie *(Crosses DRC closer to audience. Other patients and Dennis look out of the window, smoking)*

One day at Alberta Hospital, Dennis and some patients were looking out of the window. A car was driving by. It stopped suddenly. Had a flat tire. The driver was very angry. He jacked up the wheel. Took the lug nuts off and put them into the hub cap. He was so angry he kicked the hub cap. It went into a ditch full of dirty water. He couldn't find the nuts. He was furious. The patients were watching all of this. *(The driver is deep in the dirty water, arms wet, looking for the lug nuts.)*

Dennis went down to see the man. This could have been awkward. People drive by here and they know it's a hospital full of patients with mental illness.

Dennis (*Surveying the situation.)* You seem very upset today

Driver Wouldn't you be…I have to be at an important meeting, and now I've lost the lug nuts and I can't put the wheel back on.

Dennis (*Considering)* Well, why don't you take one of the lug nuts off each of the other three wheels, put them on that one, and then you can drive to a service station

Frannie And the man looked at the patient and at the Hospital

(He could look at the window and patients could wave)

Driver Aren't you from Alberta Hospital?

Frannie And the patient said

Dennis Yes. I'm from Alberta Hospital.
I'm crazy, I'm not stupid!

All Patients (*Watching from window)* We're crazy, we're not stupid.

Frannie That's right, I was crazy but I wasn't stupid.
And now I'm not crazy anymore.